25th Year of Publication

PDC 58370-9

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

ISAAC ASIMOV
Look Long Upon A Monkey

SEPTEMBER 75c • UK 35p.

MANLY WADE WELLMAN
ROBERT F. YOUNG
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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 47; No. 3, Whole No. 280, Sept. 1974. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $.75 per copy. Annual subscription $8.50; $9.00 in Canada and Mexico, $9.50 in other foreign countries. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Editorial submissions should be sent to 347 East 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

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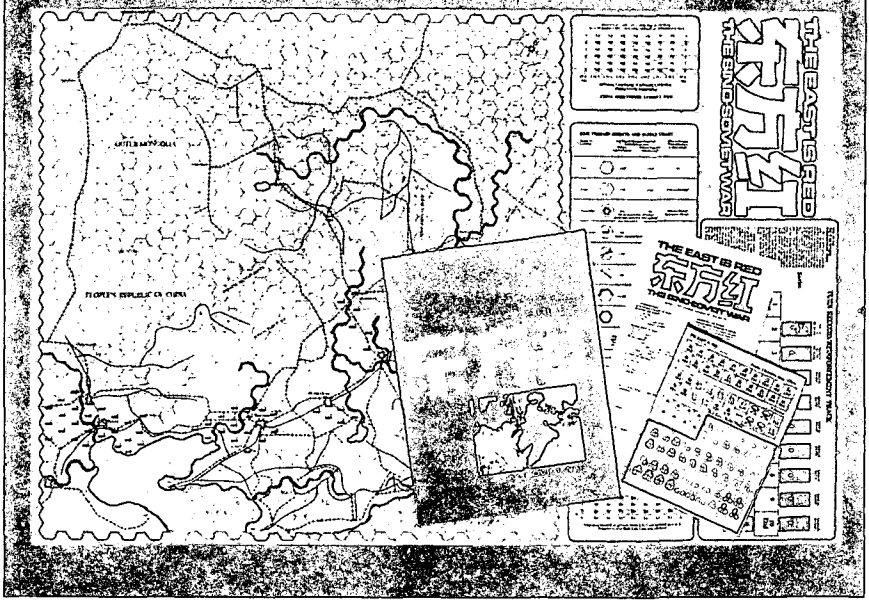

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Mr. Wellman offers another fine story about strange doings in the Southern Appalachian mountains, this time more science fiction than fantasy. And if you follow the story carefully, you can build your own pole cabin.

Goodman's Place

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

When Doc Ferro came to these mountains, folks asked him to cure what ailed them. He said he was a doctor of philosophy, not medicine, but he whispered over Lottie Burden's sore jaw and put flower dust to Sam Taber's lame arm and they got well. He fetched his stuff to board at the Uttiger house. He was a smooth, middling tall man, maybe thirty-five, with dark hair. His brows made one line above his eyes, and he wore black pants and a wide black hat, and under his long black coat a white shirt and tie. His square teeth showed when he smiled.

He asked to buy Goodman's Place that old Mrs. Sue Lovatt owned, other side of Darkscrabble Creek. She took his offer, but felt bound to tell him what she'd heard when she was young; how five-six men and women rented from her grandsire to build on, how whatever they were up to made the neighbors burn them out, and maybe not all of them came clear of the fire. Goodman's Place didn't much tempt hunters or gadabouts. Trees shut off the daylight there, and sometimes rain fell and lightning skippered when it was fair other places. Beasts and birds stayed off, too, except things folks weren't sure of and hated to guess at. And how if you passed there towards evening, sometimes you heard a singing or mumbling.

Doc Ferro smiled with his square teeth. "Let me worry about those old notions, Ma'am," he said. "I've walked there, and things seemed quiet. Anyway, isn't Goodman's Place a good name for a home? Here's half the money. I'll pay the rest the day I finish my cabin."

Glenn and Becky Uttiger and their daughter Grace liked Doc in their home. He was neat and clever. Some nights he read stories to them

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from his books. The only one he could hire to cut trees and set up a cabin at Goodman's Place was Sue Lovatt's grandson Hode, twenty that summer and fresh back out of the army. Hode was more than common tall and ganted everywhere but across the shoulders and hands, like his grandsire and daddy, both dead and gone. His yellow hair was thick behind his ears and on his forehead. "You're not scared of Goodman's Place, are you?" Doc Ferro inquired him.

"Not till I see something to scare me," said Hode.

"We'll work from nine in the morning till three," Doc told him. "I'll pay a dollar an hour."

"That sounds fine," Hode agreed him. But he'd really taken the job to be round and watch. He didn't relish how Doc smiled and sweet-talked Grace Uttiger.

Two years back when Hode enlisted, Grace had been just a girl. Now she'd come on to be a slim, well-grown young women, with big blue eyes and hair as black as a yard up a chimney. Hode had already bluffed out two fellows who wanted to talk to her. But the Uttigers liked Doc better.

"Your daughter's intelligent," Doc told them. "I'll lend her books to read. She'd ornament a bigger, more gracious society then this--not that I find fault with the good friends I've made here."

And Grace said to Hode, "I'll go with you to the Whippard's party tomorrow night, but tonight I want to read in this book Dr. Ferro lent me. All about knights of old and ladies fair."

"It looks too dry for me," said Hode, though he'd have loved to read in it if it wasn't Doc Ferro's book.

"He's travelled in lands beyond the sea."

"So have I," Hode reminded her.

"But all you did was fight."

"That's a right much to do, most times," Hode said.

When he and Doc waded Darkscrabble and went up to Goodman's Place, he felt the trees standing mightily close to him in gray air. Doc shed his coat and turned up his shirt sleeves, and chopped as well as Hode while they cleared a yard. Big black stones showed there, laid out oblong for a foundation.

"A house stood here, and a house will stand here again," Doc said. "This log will make our first sill."

Hode trimmed branches off. "I hear singing," he said. "Humming."

"Your imagination," said Doc. "Let's flatten the sill log's bottom side, and notch the top for the sleepers."

They shaped two sill logs, laid

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them both solid on the stones, and fitted two more logs across the ends for the first sleepers. That made a start, about sixteen feet by twenty. They ranged on more sleepers, two feet apart, flat sides up to bear the floor.

"We'll split floor slabs later," said Doc. "First, more wall logs. Let's cut them here in front for the door."

"Just one door?" Hode asked.

"I won't need a back door to run out of when a visitor knocks at the front," smiled Doc, tinny-eyed. "We'll center that door here at the east. Where's our saw?"

It got shadowier while they put up more logs, and it was sort of smoky amongst the trees when Doc said, "Noon. Let's have this good lunch Mrs. Uttiger put up for us."

Eating the sandwiches, Hode thought again he heard that soft song, with words he didn't quite catch. Back at work, he tried to chop loud enough to shut the song away. He was glad when Doc took out his watch and said, "Three o'clock. We'll come back again tomorrow. Here's six dollars, Hode. I'll pay you at the end of each day."

But it was dark in those woods for just three o'clock. Picking up the tools, Hode heard a flutter in branches above him, like wings. But birds stayed out of Goodman's Place. If that was a bat, it would be as big as a dog. He was glad to go with Doc across Darkscrabble and to the Uttiger place. Grace was sweeping off the front stoop. She smiled at Hode, then smiled bigger at Doc Ferro. "Good evening," Hode bade her, and headed off to his grandmother's cabin.

After supper, he got out the banjo his daddy had left him. He tuned it and picked and sang a song he recollected from his grandsire:

"Them things up there
at Goodman's
At Goodman's where
they dwell,
For one drop of a
virgin's blood
They'd wade the fords
of hell."

Singing and picking, he wondered what that song meant. Next day, they cut and laid up more logs and marked window places at the back wall and ends and both sides of the door in front. That might, half a moon shone over the mountains. Hode called for Grace and took her to the dancing at the Whippards' new barn. But Doc Ferro was there and played the fiddle for the dances. Old folks said he out did the playing of champion fiddlers in past years, like Os Deaver and Mitch Wallin. Nothing would do Doc but that Hode go fetch his banjo to play along with him. Hode picked his possible best, but he couldn't dance with Grace

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while he picked. The praise Doc spoke him wasn't enough comfort for that.

More wall logs to hike up next day, with the door hole and the window holes held square by chunks between the logs. Before three o'clock, they muscled up two twenty-foot logs for plates and two sixteen-footers top of the side walls, and jammed them into their notches. By now, Hode didn't hear the singing so much, and wondered if maybe he was getting used to it. Doc paid him six dollars as usual and said, "You're earning more than your wages, Hode."

The day after that, Saturday, they strung lap-jointed joist logs across the plates, and at midpoint of these set up four-foot pieces to hold the ridgepole above all. Then they notched six-inch poles for rafters and slanted them up, spiking them to plates and ridgepole. "Tomorrow, Sunday, we rest," said Doc when they quit. "We'll get back Monday to do the floors and shingling and so on."

Hode polished his boots that night, and after noon dinner Sunday he headed for the Uttiger place. Mrs. Uttiger said, "Grace and Dr. Ferro made themselves a picnic and went out." Not a short answer, but not a very long one either. Hode headed back down the path, following the prints of Grace's little shoes and Doc's narrow ones to where they turned off toward Darkscrabble.

Those tracks led to where a tree lay across the creek. Hode pinched a frown, imagining Doc holding Grace's hand to help her over. He didn't cross there, he went up to where he could wade, polished boots and all. Then back to follow the tracks. He moved like the hunter he was, from behind one tree to another. As he got close, sure enough he heard voices, plainer than the other times.

But that was Grace talking and Doc replying her. Hode moved without showing himself, to where he could see.

"Goodman's is a good name all right," Doc was saying. "It was meant to be particularly good, long ago in England."

Grace sat on a log in front of where Doc sat in the door hole of the cabin, and poured from a jug into Doc's cup—buttermilk, likely. The Uttigers were proud for their churning.

"Goodman's Field, or Goodman's Grove," Doc went on. "Many places called that, to mean land set aside for the one they called Goodman because they never dared call him Satan."

"Does Goodman's Place mean Satan's Place?" Grace asked, and she sounded a mite scared.

"Those who built here must have thought so, before they were

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driven away," said Doc. "But I don't think so, and you needn't."

"Don't you believe in Satan?" asked Grace.

"Not especially." Doc's teeth smiled. "I've studied that belief for years, belief in what comes out of nowhere to fighten you. But my theory might sound silly."

"No," she said back, "nothing you say sounds silly."

Hode made a face. Grace talked like a little girl instead of a big one; though sometimes big girls flatter a fellow like that.

"You've a good, trusting soul, Grace." Doc's voice was gentle. "Now, to explain, I have to talk about astronomy."

"The sun and moon and planets and stars." Grace was proud to know what astronomy was.

"Suns and moons and planets make up systems," said Doc. "Systems make up galaxies—too big in space to comprehend, at least for you and me. And many galaxies make up our universe."

"Isn't the universe everything?" Grace added in. "No end to it, no end to space?"

"Not everything, child," Doc Ferro said gently. "The astronomers say that the universe is like the film of a soap bubble, only unthinkably great. And in the film, our worlds and suns and galaxies—in the film itself, not inside or outside."

Harking to him, Hode almost forgot to be jealous of him.

"But what's inside or outside?" Grace asked.

"We can only guess at that," said Doc. "Maybe inside the universe bubble is all that happened in the past, while it grew. Outside may be waiting all that will happen when the bubble swells to it. But you wonder what all this has to do with Goodman's Place."

"Yes, sir," Grace agreed him.

"Think, my child, what if other universes are bubbling all around ours? What if one touches our universe, at some solid point?"

Hode could see Grace smile. "That's hard to think about."

"What if men found that happening, all through history?" Doc said. "A Goodman's Place, where another universe looks into ours?"

Grace hiked her pretty shoulders. "That scares me."

"People fear what's strange," Doc nodded. "But maybe people have met unknown things from other universes, gave them gifts and got gifts in exchange. I've been studying that."

Grace got up. "I hope I don't have bad dreams tonight."

"Don't fear dreams, Grace. But those old charms and incantations to call up Satan at strange places—what if they really let creatures from other universes

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through? Would you fear that?"

"Not if you were there, Dr. Ferro, but I don't know what to say."

"Then say nothing for the time being. To nobody."

Hode backed off, got across Darkscrabble and home. He felt low in his mind about spying on Doc and Grace. That night at supper, he asked his grandmother if she'd ever heard tell of calling up Satan at Goodman's Place. She named it that she'd heard some rumor tale, but not just what. "Recollect," she said, "that Satan hasn't nair power over a pure heart."

Hode didn't feel comforted. He didn't reckon his heart was all that pure. He ate some cornpone and chicken and went to bed, but he didn't sleep air wink for hours.

He felt jumpy working with Doc on Monday. If Goodman's Place was Satan's Place, it was next door to hell, which had been a scare word when he was a boy. He'd never dared say it for fear God would get mad and put him there.

They spiked lathing slabs on the rafters. Then Hode sawed oak logs into bolts, while Doc split them into shingles with a mallet and froe. Hode had trouble sawing bolts enough to keep up with him. He heard voices singing a moany song just past reach of his ear. He looked over his shoulder, time and time again, but saw only misty shadows.

Nailing the singles Tuesday, Hode mentioned to Doc about the singing, and Doc laughed him out of it again. After that, the singing died down till you hardly knew it was there, but it was there all right. At three o'clock, Hode allowed it might could rain.

"No," Doc smiled. "That's the shade of the branches."

Hode looked up as he took his six dollars. No clouds in the sky; just that grubby mist amongst the trees. Hode almost quit the job, but for two reasons he didn't. First, he wasn't coward enough to quit just for being nervish; second, he wanted to study out what Doc was up to with Grace Uttiger.

Shingling the balance of the roof and the gable ends took most of Wednesday. "We'll be done by day after tomorrow," said Doc, with nails in his mouth. "Friday, in time for the full moon."

"You sound as if you work by the signs," said Hode, on the ground riving slabs for door and window frames. "I've heard tell if you start something of a Friday, you never finish the job. But what if you finish of a Friday?"

Doc swung down and looked sharp at Hode. "Do you credit such beliefs?"

Hode started nailing a plank in for the side frame of the door. "I just note beliefs and try to find out

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the truth of them. Truth comes along in strange places."

Doc fitted a shorter piece to a window hole. "Hode," he said, "you show sense in the things you say. What would you call the biggest, best thing in the world a man could have?"

Hode drove a nail. "Offhand, I'd say true love."

"True love," Doc repeated him. "Is that better than wisdom and power?"

"I reckon wisdom and power come with true love, Dr. Ferro."

Doc fitted another piece of window frame. "We're doing well," he changed the subject. "We still have the floor slabs to lay, and the side logs to chink."

"And a door and windows to hang in," Hode added to that. "And how about a fireplace?"

"Those things can wait in this good weather," said Doc. "I'll be moved in before they're needed."

It put an end to the talk, the way Doc could make an end come.

On Thursday morning they fetched four big buckets to Darkscrabble Creek. Doc shovelled clay into them and mixed in trickle by trickle of water. "It must be sticky and tough at the same time," he said, stirring. "Help me get these buckets up to the cabin. I'll chink the logs while you split some floor slabs."

Hode watched Doc work while he himself rived slabs. Chinking with clay was old-timey; Hode never recollected seeing it done before. Doc wadded the stuff between the logs with his hands and shaped it with a whittled stick. "Never let it bulge out, or the rain will wash it," he lectured Hode. "Recess it solidly between the logs."

Hode made the floor slabs flat on both sides, and when he had enough to start with he went inside and began to spike them to the sleepers. Out yonder, Doc chinked away like an expert. He stood on a piece of oak log to put the clay to the chinks. The cabin began to darken inside as he sealed out the light. When Hode used up his slabs, he went out to rive more. The flooring job took care, as much as Doc's chinking, and they still had plenty of both to do when Doc said, "We'll go down to the creek, I must wash up. After we eat, we'll get more buckets of clay."

Something moved at the creekside as they got there, and Hode felt his hair crawl. But it was Grace, coming through the trees. She'd fetched their noon dinner, enough for her to eat with them. There were sausage biscuits and a steaming pot of cornfield beans and bacon, and a cold jug of buttermilk. Grace said, "How you come on, Hode, how's your grandma?", very sweetly, but mostly she talked to Doc as they

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ate. She'd been reading one of his books, called *Magick, Its Theory and Practice,* by Aleister Crowley, and she wondered Doc why Mr. Crowley spelled *Magick* with a k. Doc grinned his teeth and said Mr. Crowley had spent long years studying old, old things, including the spellings. When they'd done eating, Grace wanted to help mix the clay in the buckets, but Doc said not to dirty her hands. So she goodbyed them and headed home.

"Do you hold by magic?" Hode asked Doc as they carried the buckets.

"Only when it helps explain something sensible," said Doc. "Many modern sciences started with magic. Alchemy helped develop chemistry. Astrology helped develop astronomy, and modern medicine began with conjuring. We'll talk about it sometime."

Hode went on splitting and nailing down the floor slabs, Doc chinking the logs. When it was three o'clock, Doc said, "I should be able to move in by noon tomorrow."

"You don't have a bed or a chair, even," said Hode.

"I'll more or less camp here tomorrow night," Doc replied. "The night of the full moon."

Again he'd named it about the full moon.

Back home that night, Hode dug out the almanac. It said the full moon rose the next night about half-past seven, less than an hour after sunset. He recollected old tales of the full moon, how some folks turned into wolves that time, how the tides of the sea rose their highest. That was another night when Hode nair slept much, wondering if there was aught he could do about this that would be right.

When Hode got to Uttiger's next morning, Doc asked him to help carry stuff. There was a blanket roll and some pots and pans and a bag of food, and some of Doc's books. "This will do to start with," Doc allowed. "I'll fetch up the rest of my things later."

They dumped their loads on the half of the floor that was already down, and split slabs to finish the other half. While Hode split the logs, Doc spiked them to the sleepers. He was good at fitting them close and even. But as Hode fetched in a stack of slabs, he saw Doc beside the wall logs at the back. His knife was out and open, and he was cutting something on a log.

"I'm just marking the date of this house," Doc grinned. "Now, those slabs will just about finish the floor."

He bent to pick up the saw. Hode looked across him at what was cut on the wall. It didn't look

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like figures of a date, didn't look to be figures at all, nor either to be air letters Hode could read. Other places on the logs, Doc had carved more strange signs. Hode headed for the door, and as he went he saw that one of Doc's books lay open on the blanket, in the light of a window hole. He said nair word. He couldn't think of aught to say, not then. He split a few last slabs for Doc to put down, and then cleaned up the truck in the yard. When Doc came out again, Hode spoke.

"I fetched something for the new house," he said, and dug it out of his back pocket. "A horseshoe. Folks put them over their doors, you know."

Doc took the shoe and laughed. "I don't think I'll put it up there," he said. "A horseshoe is to keep away witches, and I don't believe in them."

"What if a witch came and made you believe?" Hode asked, and Doc gave him a quick, sharp look.

"Maybe she and I could learn something from each other," he answered. "But thanks, Hode, for bringing this. I tell you what, let's both spit on it for luck and I'll throw it in Darkscrabble Creek."

They spit, and Doc trotted away toward Darkscrabble. Hode watched him go among the trees, then quick headed inside the cabin to where that book lay open.

It wasn't a printed book. It had words written in red ink, in what looked like a right old-timey hand:

Hail our Father, which WERT in heaven!

But afterwards; see your temple finished on Friday of the full moon; at moonrise, make on the earth before the door a cricle ten feet across, and within that a pentacle in which you may stand. At each point of the pentacle, a word of these: ALPHA, OMEGA, BELPHEGOR, GOETULA, TETRAGRAMMATON.

See you stand within pentacle and circle, and with you a virgin you have selected. Build there a fire of manner previously described above. Then say boldly the words you have learned for the summoning. When those come who are called, they will grant what you ask, in exchange for the blood of the virgin. . .

"Hode! Hode!" Doc was calling outside, and Hode came out.

"What were you doing in there?" Doc growled.

"Walking the floor to test it."

"I've already done that." Out came Doc's watch. "It's noon, and we're finished. But here," and he fumbled for money. "I'll pay you your full six dollars, you've worked so well. Goodbye, and thanks."

Leaving, Hode wondered if Doc hung back to finish the house sure enough, without him.

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Alone, he tried to study out some sense of things. Our Father which WERT in heaven — that wasn't the Lord's prayer he knew. What might could it have to do with Satan falling out of heaven? One thing he didn't like, that about the virgin's blood. That had to mean Grace Uttiger's blood, whose else? Other things, those marks on the walls inside, the names in the book, they were past and beyond Hode's thinking. At home he asked his grandmother, "What's a pentacle?"

"Oh, just lines crisscrossed to make a star shape, thisaway." She traced with her finger on the table. "It goes into a quilt pattern, the one they call Witch Blazing Star."

"Witch Blazing Star," he repeated her. "Is that a witch spell?"

"I heard tell, when I was a little girl, that make of quilt would keep off witches from the bed. What you got in mind, Hode?"

"Just bothering," he said. "Can't rightly decide what to say or do."

"Hode Lovatt," said his grandmother, "you're a good man, like what your grandsire and your daddy were before you. Nor I don't mean a good man like what Goodman's Place got named for. I'm glad you're through working there."

"Maybe I'm not through working there," was all he could say.

"Then bear in mind that goodness lays over badness," she told him. "Lays over it air time."

Not much comfort, but it was something. Hode wished he was as good as his old grandmother thought. Trying to fit sense together was another sight harder than fitting up logs and shakes and slabs to make Doc Ferro's house. One thing was sure; whatever happened was set to happen when the full moon came up, not long past sundown.

He pretended to eat his supper, and went out into the last gray of the light, heading for Darkscrabble Creek and Goodman's place just beyond.

For the first time in his life, Hode Lovatt felt thankful for training in army night maneuvers. He got across Darkscrabble Creek without making air sound, then waited a breath or two to figure on the trees. They were crammed so full of dark mist he wondered if he could brush it away like a curtain. He moved on, setting his heels down and then his toes, to keep from rustling leaves or weeds. He caught branches and eased past them to keep them quiet. Up ahead he saw light. The rising moon, and something besides the moon.

He heard, too. That singing he'd learned to expect, but not

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quite the same. It had a tune different from in the daytime, high and low together, like harmony. And suddenly, Grace Uttiger's voice:

"I'm afraid, Dr. Ferro!"

As Hode slid forward amongst the trees, he heard Doc reply her, "Fear nothing, Grace. We're here to find such power as this world doesn't know. Here, inside this diagram, we're safe."

Hode crawled on his hands and knees to where he could see into the clearing in front of the cabin, bright with the light of the rising moon and of a fire that burned blue and green.

Doc and Grace were there beside the fire. Around them were marks in the earth amongst the stumps, a circle, and a star inside that. Doc's book had mentioned such markings. Grace cowered in her gingham dress. Doc stood straight in his black coat, his hat off, his left hand up above his head, his right holding something at his side.

But they weren't alone in the yard. Things, blurred and gloomy black, humped over in a ring all round them, seeming to look at Doc and Grace inside the circle. First look, Hode reckoned they were folks, a bunch come out to see what was up. Second look, he knew he'd nair seen the like of them.

They had crouched-down bodies, and heads, but the shoulders didn't shape up like shoulders. The heads themselves had here and there a horn, or two horns, or things sticking out like horns. Doc moved his left hand over his head like a signal. One of the things signaled back. But its arm, if that was an arm, wiggled in the air like a long black snake, and its hand seemed to have a heap of extra fingers. The singing rose louder. Doc said a word Hode couldn't understand, maybe it was a name. He said another, louder than the first. Then a third, shouting it. The crooning hum seemed to stir the dark mist in the trees where Hode rose on one knee. All sorts of arms and hands lifted up.

"Now, Grace," and Doc brought down his left hand and took hold of her arm. Hode saw his right hand, with a knife as bright as the moon.

"Don't" she screamed. "You promised I wouldn't be hurt!"

"I lied to you, Grace," Doc said patiently, the way you talk to a baby child. "I had to get you here. I needed you, I needed your blood to buy —"

"Stop right there!" Hode yelled his loudest, jumping to his feet, and Doc looked round to see who was speaking.

Hode ran straight at the fire, amongst humped backs turned

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toward him. Heads lifted, no faces to them, just rotten-bright eyes. The singing rose to a roar, and Hode choked as if the air had been shut off. He took a big leap, clear in over that blue-green fire, and he got both hands on Grace and he yanked her away from Doc.

"You'll kill us all, you fool," he heard Doc gurgle.

Doc slashed at Hode, but already Hode had dragged Grace clear out of that star-and-circle diagram. The voices yapped and bawled round him, and shapes came stumbling toward him.

"You can't take her," Doc was gabbling. Here came Doc, the knife up again. The shapes crowded round them all three, and the air was breathless tight in there.

As Doc came close, Hode let go Grace with one hand and fisted it to fling like a chunk of stone. Smash into Doc's face it drove. Hode felt the nose and teeth break as it slammed in. Doc went over backward like a cornstalk in a high wind. As he struggled to get up, the light showed blood all shiny over his face. The things turned quick toward Doc. Hode didn't tarry longer. He made for the trees, fetching Grace along in a flutter.

Nothing followed him. Hode looked around once. The shapes bunched and stooped round where Doc had gone done. Hode and Grace ran between the trees,

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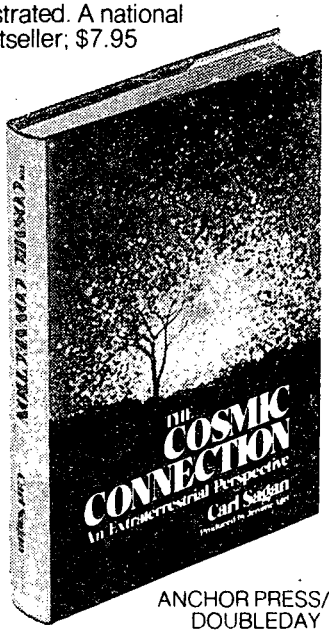

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bumping into them hard. Back there rose Doc's voice:

"Help!"

More jumps amongst the trees, as fast as Hode could go and make Grace hurry along with him. Again Doc yelled out:

"Help!"

Up ahead, the moon made splashes of bright light on Darkscrabble's waters. Hode floundered right in. He slipped and almost went down, but he got his feet back under him. He dragged Grace to the far side, and they both fell down there. Once more Doc's cry:

"Oh, help!"

Not a sound more, the singing or anything. Just the fall of Hode's feet and Grace's feet and their gasping for breath as they ran through the night, ran for where they knew about things, where would be folks' houses.

Back home, Grace stammered to her folks that she and Hode would be married, she loved him more than all this world, and they goggled but said all right. Next day, Mrs. Sue Lovatt called in neighbors to hear Hode and Grace tell their tale. It called out all those recollections of what had happened at Goodman's Place long before. Some reckoned that Doc Ferro had found the books and spells of that other bunch that once, maybe, had tried to call up strange creatures to turn stones to gold for them or set them on the thrones of the world. Old Sam Taber allowed that whether or not Doc was a virgin, the blood Hode fetched out on his face must have satisfied whatever that called-up bunch of things were, since they hadn't tried to come after Grace's blood.

Nobody felt brash enough, then or later, to go look for what might could have happened to Doc in his own front yard. Not long ago a fellow came visiting and mentioned someone named Charles Fort, who wrote books about how things can come to this world from other worlds and bring all manner of strange happenings, and how it's no good pushing them too close if you can help it.

Some vow there's still a singing hum round Goodman's Place, and if you go to where you can see, there's the cabin Doc and Hode built, all falling in, with strange-looking vines snaked all over it and strange-looking flowers bunched at the door. So I hear tell. But, gentlemen, don't ask me to go there and find out for a fact.

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Ted Thomas's first story here since "The Tour," (March 1971) concerns an expedition to Jupiter which is trapped under a thousand kilometers of liquid hydrogen.

The Rescuers

by TED THOMAS

Robert Persus looked out the viewing port at Jupiter below. A soft feminine voice rang through the great wheel that was base. "Fifty-five minutes and counting. All dive personnel report to the main shop and prepare for boarding." Persus shook his head as he looked down at the Great Red Spot. He knew he was looking at a disturbance in the upper reaches of Jupiter's atmosphere and that it was caused by the presence either of a depression or a plateau on the solid core of the planet. But which was it? If it were a plateau, he could probably reach it and take samples. If it were a depression, he would probably never reach it. There was no way to tell from Taylor column mechanics which it was. Persus took a last, long look at the Great Red Spot, then worked his way to the main shop. He walked in and looked around.

Thirty men and women worked there, and they quickly noticed the commander's presence. Nobody said anything, nobody did anything differently, but the feel in the shop took on a different texture. Nor was it more tense, as is sometimes the result when a chief joins his men. Instead, there was a relaxed sharpness in the air, a feeling that was at once a relief and an increased awareness. Something that had been missing was missing no longer.

The submersible crew had already lined up in a ragged line at the boarding port that connected base to the descent module. That module, the Jupiter Diver Submersible, was so large that it could not be kept inboard the base. An umbilical connected the interior of base to the interior of the sub. Spacesuits and work modules enabled work on the exterior. Robert Persus looked around, not so much to see as to sense the

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tensions in the air. The air felt good to him; and he said, "Well, unless anybody knows of a reason why not, commence boarding." They grinned at him, and the first man stepped to the port and eased his lean frame through.

JOHN S. CARR, 28, B.S., mechanical engineering, Pennsylvania State University, married, pilot. When Johnny Carr was eleven years old he used to amuse his friends by catching flies in midflight between his thumb and forefinger. His extraordinary reflexes went unused until he saw a fencing match in his freshman year at Penn State. In two years he was national fencing champion, leaving his nearest competitors shaking their heads in disbelief. There never had been anyone like him. Good-natured, unruffled, slightly better than average grades, Johnny took off his cap and gown on graduation day and climbed into the seat of a jet trainer. Everything came easily to him. He seemed part of the machinery he drove. He met a tall, lean redhead who quickly understood that with Johnny the running of machinery would always come first. As soon as Johnny sensed that she understood that, he married her. Yet Johnny carried an odd anomaly deep inside; in an age of computer technology, he distrusted computers. The irrational feeling doubtless stemmed from his enormous confidence in his own ability, coupled with an unrecognized resentment that there existed a near-entity that could react faster than he. Johnny Carr quickly slipped through the port into the sub. Norelli stepped up.

ERDO E. NORELLI, 33 Ph.D., electrical engineering, Syracuse University, married, communications. Norelli could enunciate complex English sentences at the age of two, and by the time he was four he spoke three languages. Careful study by groups at Harvard and Long Island failed to bring out the reason why this particular child was so astonishingly gifted in languages. At fourteen he was fluent in fourteen languages, and it was then that he decided that communications between people was the most important single factor in man's existence. He switched to electronics. He headed the group that explored communication systems to be used in the hydrogen-helium media of Jupiter. Never was a high-order research program so unsuccessful. Electromagnetic radiation in all wavelengths was quickly absorbed. Sonar was the most feasible, but suspended particles of colloidal sulfur reduced sonar to a maximum range of several hundred meters. So Norelli was almost a total failure in his work on the use of signals in the gaseous atmosphere and the

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liquid seas of Jupiter, but no one blamed him. The submersible would have to make its try almost blind, and Norelli's main role would be research. And Norelli, man of words and wavelengths, nursed a secret goal. He knew in his heart there had to be a way, somehow, for Man to communicate with God. There had to be a way to breach the greatest of all communications barriers. Norelli, before he died, meant to find it. He followed Carr into the sub. Hoffman stepped up.

SHARON L. HOFFMAN, 30, Ph.D., physical chemistry, Harvard University, single, environment analyzer. An attractive women with a slight but rounded figure, Sharon Hoffman at the age of eight knew she was going to be a scientist. With a powerful and incisive mind buried in the psyche of a woman, Hoffman early decided to act the role of the dry, clipped, sexless researcher, and she acted it well. With brilliant insight Sharon Hoffman devised the STEP catalyst, the silicotungstic epizootate, that converted elemental sulfur to hydrogen sulfide and released three kilocalories of heat per mole in doing it. That heat would keep hull temperature of the submersible a minimum of twenty degrees Kelvin above ambient temperature. That heat allowed the hull designers to build for requisite hull speed and made the expedition possible. Hoffman's team invented the foamed polyurethane matrix that carried the gel that supported the STEP in a flexible blanket pattern encasing the working quarters of the submersible. All systems were thoroughly tested and documented in the cryogenic tanks on Earth and on unmanned probes on Jupiter. There were no failures, save one. It had happened late one night when Sharon Hoffman was alone in the lab. There was no reason why there should finally be a failure in a series of thirty-six successes. Doubtless a human failure in setting up that particular run; so Sharon Hoffman discarded the results and made no entries or reports. Gene-deep in her was the ancient and certain knowledge of Woman that if you don't get caught at it, it did not happen. She entered the submersible after Carr and Norelli.

STANLEY Z. KRANSKI, 35 M.S., cybernetics, University of Chicago, married, sampler and assistant pilot. In the seventh grade Kranski learned that the history of Man's development started only when Man first began to use tools. The discovery came as a shock to the young man. He had thought that Man was sufficient unto himself. Yet as he grew older he saw that there was no single task that could be carried out by the unaided human body. When a man

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dug a hole, he used a shovel. When he painted, puttied, potted, he used a tool. When he wrote, he needed a pencil. Man was nothing without tools, and the young Kranski took his observation to heart. He came to believe that a man was not a full man unless he used tools to their fullest extent. The tool was an extension of the human body, and the most complete man was the one who used his tools best. Since no tool was more perfect than servomechanisms, early in college Kranski specialized in servomechanisms. His goal was to devise the perfect servomechanism, one that would extend each of Man's senses to the limits of sensitivity and strength of materials. In graduate school and in industry he made great strides in devising servomechanisms, and no one was more skilled than he at manipulation. No one became more a part of the machinery than Kranski. His hands and his feet seemed to become extensions of the cams and bars and runners, and he and his servomechanisms fused into a kind of entity. He was convinced that it was possible to hook the machinery directly into the human system, and that a new being would result. Kranski was a mystic. He went in through the port following Hoffman, knowing he would be the one to pull a sample of the material that caused the Great Red Spot.

DAVID R. MESSERSMITH, 31, Ph.D., mathematics, California Institute of Technology, married, computerman. Music was Dave Messersmith's third love, the first two being computers and his wife. There was really no good reason why he was not a first-rate, professional trumpet player, except he believed that the life of a mathematician was healthier, with its better hours, regular meals, and infrequent traveling. Besides, he loved math almost as much. He was a joyous man with a ready smile and a warm quip; yet his quips were never barbed, never goading. His presence in a group seemed to smooth away tensions, although no one was aware of anything specific he said or did. He simply had a contagiously sunny disposition. He was a creative designer of software with a high talent for original concepts in the use of computers, and the submersible had in it computer hardware unique in the exploration of hostile environments. Messersmith waited for Kranski to clear the port and then climbed in after him.

DONALD E. EVANS, 36, Ph.D., electronics, University of Florida, single, drone control. Evans was an instinctive gadgeteer. As a young boy he built gadgets to open and close doors and windows. The older he grew, the more sophiscated were his gadgets. He

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could always build something to do anything. Evans had great empathy with death. In the laboratory and in the training center he could hardly wait each month until the scientific journals with the obituaries came in. He would seize them, hustle off to a quiet corner, and quickly scan them to see who had died. Often he would see a familiar name, perhaps a scientist who had once delivered a paper at a meeting attended by Evans. He would rush to a typewriter and compose a sympathy letter:

My dear Mrs. Parker,

It was with a deep sense of loss that I saw in the journal Science the notice of the death of your husband, Professor Herbert Parker. It has been four years since I met your husband when he delivered a paper at the Spring Meeting of the American Chemical Society at Atlantic City. He was a gifted man, a true teacher, and those of us who heard his paper on "Physiological Tremor" will never forget him.

I know that words are small comfort to you and your children at a time like this, but I wanted you to know that I and many others like me share at least to some extent the deep sense of loss you must feel. We can all take comfort from the fact that this world is a better place for having had Professor Herbert Parker pass through it. If there is anything I can do, anything at all, please, please let me know. We are all one at a time like this.

With my deepest sympathies,
Donald E. Evans, Ph.D.

There were weeks when Evans was able to write as many as six such letters. He was never happier then, and his work flourished. It was during one such continous letter-writing period that he made his breakthrough in remote-controlled sensing devices. His drones functioned better during deep dives than any others, and it was he who suggested use of the drones in the liquid environment of Jupiter to extend the sensing capabilities of the submersible. Evans climbed into the port and worked his way to his chair and locked himself into it.

The six people in the sub began bringing their instruments on the line. Their backs were toward the axis of the sub where the great inner bore passed completely through the fifty-meter length. The control room was in the shape of a cylinder twenty meters long and ten meters wide, with a four-meter solid core down the center to contain the engines and exhaust conduit. The instrument board for each person curved up in front of each chair, and the controls were arranged as a kind of piano keyboard curved around each chair. Half the crew was out of sight

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of the other half, but a visual intercom connected them into a single working unit. Everything except needles and dial faces was colored an attractive light grey or cream color. The whole effect was pleasing to the eye, and the crowding of the instrument panels gave the control room an efficient but cozy feel. There was room to move from one chair to another, and a protective panel around each instrument board made it possible to move around no matter what the orientation of the sub. There were no hard surfaces. Every surface was padded, and there was a sprinkling of handholds to aid in crawling from one place to another in heavy gravitation.

Robert Persus remained behind momentarily in the main shop and listened to the countdown from there. The people inside the sub, one at a time, entered the final procedure, checking, rechecking, and checking again. No one spoke to Persus. At minus five minutes Johnny Carr started the great engines, and even inside base they could feel the vibration. At minus three minutes Persus looked around and went to the port. No one spoke as he lifted both feet through. But just before his head disappeared, every person in the main shop looked around and went to the port. No one spoke as he lifted both feet through. But just before his head disappeared, every person in the main shop looked at him. He felt their stares, and he paused and looked back and waved. Someone, Persus could not tell who, called to him, "Good luck, Commander, and watch your STEP."

Persus felt an unreasoning surge of annoyance, but he quelled it and shook his head and entered the sub. Two men swung home the hatch, and Persus dogged it from the inside. Then he went to his chair and locked himself in. The countdown went to zero, and the holding frame fell free.

Sharing the same momentum as base, the sub remained in its position. Johnny Carr ticked the main engine and brought in a steering engine. The stern of the sub swung out a bit, and Carr ticked in another steering engine. Back and forth he went, slowly jockeying the Sub to a safe distance from base. He lined up the axis of the sub with the Red Spot below and gently brought on the main engine. Base's orbit was such that base remained fixed over the Red Spot, and so the sub merely had to drop along a plumb line to reach the Spot. Using his instruments, Johnny Carr lined up the center of base with the center of the Red Spot. At five hundred meters he checked again and increased the power, and again at a thousand

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meters, and at fifteen hundred. He made slight corrections, and the sub dropped as if it were subject solely to the pull of Jupiter's gravitation. At two thousand meters the inertial navigational system came on and began its zeroing procedure. Evans, Norelli, and Messersmith worked at top speed to fix their course both in their on-board computers and in those of base before they passed out of signal range with base.

Gradually Persus became aware that Johnny Carr was still on manual when he should have been on automatic. He waited. He made a check of all other factors, and when he was done, he saw they were still on manual. The words to Johnny Carr formed in his throat, but Johnny Carr hit the button for automatic. Yet even then Persus saw how Carr crouched over the console, hands poised, ready to take it back at any instant. Persus should have been relieved by Carr's alertness, but he was not.

The sub entered the ammonium sulfide layer and drove through it and entered the ammonia and the hydrogen sulfide layers, gathering speed as it went. They passed below the radiation belts. Sharon Hoffman announced that the sensors had picked up a thin layer of ammoniacal water, but the sub was through it in a fraction of a second. The ammonium polysulfide layers were next, and Hoffman had a full second in which to take measurements. It was the breakdown of those molecules that generated the anomalous heat radiated by the planet.

Contact with base was gone, and all aboard realized it at the same time. It is one thing to fly a trainer, even in isolation, knowing that the chances were good that help would arrive if anything went wrong. It is quite another to be totally out of reach of even a remote chance of aid. And all the mental preparation for it might just as well not have happened. With all seven people there was an inward drawing of emotions, a centering, for now there could be nothing to help them from the outside. It was a sobering experience, a reaction they had not anticipated. Every one of the widely divergent personalities aboard had at least this factor in common with the others: they were alone together in a way few people had even been. There was now nothing except them-and-the-sub, frightening, yet in a sense so narowing they could easily grasp it. There was nothing left in their thoughts except what they were doing.

The boards showed the beginnings of density increases in the outside medium. It was still ammonia rich, too soon to use the outside hydrogen as fuel, and so

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they drove on fueled by the hydrogen in their tanks. It was another hour before the drag began to show on their instruments. Ammonium salts had almost disappeared. Colloidal sulfur made a readable appearance, and Hoffman said, "STEP catalyst now functioning." It was their first landmark. It marked the beginning of the period of time running against them. The catalyst's life was forty-five hours, not really a lot of time to drive through a thousand kilometers of liquid hydrogen, take samples, and return to base. Time. Never enough time to do anything right. Why was that?

At the three-hour mark they entered the region where the hydrogen-helium was in indefinite condition, either true liquid or supercritical. The instruments could not determine the state, but it did not matter. The submersible began to gulp great quantities of the hydrogen through its center bore, using it as fuel. The ship gathered speed, and as the sonar came on, Evans and Norelli began the forward scan. Evans said over the intercom, "Our seeing range ahead is about two hundred meters. Since we cover that distance in something under one second, I would hate to have you think we can see where we're going. Here's a picture of our view forward."

Seven pairs of eyes inspected the repeater screens, but all they saw was a kind of bright, glowing, nothing. Yet it was hard for them to take their eyes off the screens. Nothing showed, but there was the possibility of something, remote as it might be. It took real effort to look away from the screen back to their boards. They felt an occasional lurch as the guidance system compensated for course errors caused by outside currents.

In an hour they took their first meal, staggering the eating sequence so that no board was left unattended. Persus insisted that when one of them ate, full attention be given to eating and zero attention be given to the operation of the submersible, in the absence of an emergency. In this way the crew achieved mental rest. A faint odor of food drifted through the cabin despite the air-treatment system, and Persus shook his head. Under incredible environmental conditions, totally dependent on esoteric equipment for each continuing second of their lives, yet the air-treating gear could not remove the odor of food from the air.

Hours passed, and the time came for deceleration. Johnny Carr took over and in a period of ten minutes brought the speed down to twenty kilometers per hour. As soon as that speed was reached, Evans began the procedure to release the two drones. In twenty

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minutes the drones ranged forward of the submersible. For the first time the screens showed two objects forward. The drones took position and showed on the screens as two grotesque elongated objects. Evans shook his head with relief when he saw them on the screen. "I knew it was working all along, mind you, but I'm still glad to see that they show up out there. What's the pressure we're under?"

Norelli said, "Don't ask. You'll stay happier." Evans let it go for the moment since he was busy checking out controls and communications with the drones. The front portion of the submersible acted as a gigantic and exceedingly accurate strain gauge. The pressure was nineteen tons per square centimeter.

The submersible settled into its approach routine. The drones ranged forward and to the sides to broaden the scope of the very limited field of view possessed by the sub alone. Each drone was programmed to follow a search pattern and then to return to the sub's communication range to check in. Evans then sent it out again. One at a time the drones went out and returned. Johnny Carr controlled the sub on manual, but a link went to Evan's board to cut in automatic control the instant a drone gave a signal that indicated a sighting.

With the actual search pattern in full swing, the atmosphere in the cabin grew tense. Kranski opened the hatches that protected his servomechanisms for taking samples. There was on Earth a school of thought that said it would be impossible to bring back a sample of solid hydrogen from under the Red Spot even if they got there, but even those people conceded it was worth a try. A wag in the Smithsonian had written a tongue-in-cheek article on the value of exhibiting a glass flask filled with a colorless gas with the explanation that here was the material which, in solid form, constituted the cause of the Great Red Spot on Jupiter.

The physical strain of moving arms, hands, and fingers in the heavy gravitation became noticeable. Persus realized he was panting slightly from the effort. He touched the com button to Hoffman and said, "I think you should increase the oxygen partial pressure. We seem to need it."

"Check." She made the adjustment, and in a few minutes the panting eased. Still, the group used the armrests in an effort to save strength. Movements were slower. Persus watched Johnny Carr closely to judge whether he should order Carr to switch to full automatic. Carr seemed normal. His eyes never left the guidance system, and his fingers played constantly on the

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control levers as he compensated for the surging currents outside. At the slower speed the crew could feel the occasional lurch of the sub as it passed through eddy currents.

A drone reported in, made its turn to go out again, and then began to drift to one side. Evans said, "Whoops. Trouble on drone Beta. Starboard control sluggish. Commander, we may lose it. Can you follow it a little, while I see if I can regain full control?"

Persus reflected. They were close to the calculated location of the source of the Spot, if it were a plateau. If it were a depression, they were not going to reach it anyway, and the loss of a drone would not matter. Was it worth the risk to change the submersible's course? Persus reflected. The only reason they were here was to sample the Red Spot. So they had to assume it was a plateau and that it lay just ahead of them. So they needed both drones, not only to find it, but to safeguard the submersible from collision. He said, "Carr, carefully follow the drone. Everyone stand by. Messersmith, keep track of our departure and let us know when we approach a course where we risk losing the other drone. Go."

They felt the sub lurch as Carr swerved on manual, a sharp lurch this time that threw them all against the left side of their chairs. Evans fingered his communication buttons and succeeded in slowing down Beta while they closed to it. When it was close alongside, he worked the starboard control back and forth until it seemed to be normal again. He said, "That may be it, Commander. Too risky and time-consuming to bring it aboard, so I recommend we continue the search pattern."

"Bring us on course, Carr, carefully please," said Persus. The lurch this time, although noticeable, was not as severe. Persus thought that Carr must be tired to have caused that initial lurch.

They settled back to work, fighting the fatigue that made every physical effort a task to think about. Persus called for more oxygen, and it helped. Two hours went by and Messersmith said, "We're an hour ahead of schedule. We should almost be there, if it's a plateau."

Tension heightened, and the increased oxygen and the excitement made all seven of them forget they were tired. The drones worked well, and they watched them appear and disappear on the screens. Carr crouched over his controls. Kranski, alongside him, followed every move. Hoffman took her samples and stored the data as she took them. Messersmith fed status data into the computer on a ten-second basis. The data bank

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was programmed to receive most of the environmental data without monitoring, but Messersmith fed in such subjective data as how the crew appeared to be holding up in the heavy gravitation, what sort of physical discomfort existed, general handleability of the sub, and other imponderables.

A soft chime rang through the sub, and Evans shouted, "There it is." They looked at each other and grinned idiotically. A drone had made contact. Somewhere a few hundred meters ahead of them was an object. The drone reappeared on the screen and gave the bearing to the object, then slowly turned and headed toward it. Evans brought in the other drone and ranged it toward the object, too. Carr brought the sub to approach speed and made his turn. Evans said, "I don't know what it is, but we were not heading for it according to the information so far from the drone. Looks like we'd have missed it without them."

Then the entire right half of Johnny Carr's control board went red.

Persus began snapping on his test circuits, calling on Messersmith for an analysis. The others turned to watch, moving sluggishly in the two and a half gees. In ten seconds Persus had his answer, and he called it out over the intercom. "The STEP blanket on the right side has failed — no protection there at all. The sub's hull is now exposed to ambient temperature, about thirteen degrees Kelvin."

All seven of them stared at the bright board, some directly, some through the intercom. No one looked at anyone else, afraid that one of them might not be taking the news impassively. No one said anything. They stared at the screens and dials.

Carr finally turned in his seat to look at Hoffman. He said, "Any idea how it happened?"

She shook her head, and there came back to her in a rush of memory a night in the laboratory, alone, and the one failure after thirty-six successes. But that couldn't be it. She looked at Carr and shook her head again.

Persus said to her, "You hesitated a moment as if you thought of something. Any ideas?"

Hoffman was shocked that he had read her thought processes so accurately. But she shook her head again, and said, "No. How long do we have?"

Messersmith snapped out of his lethargy, turned to his board, and punched up the program they had hoped they would never use. He fed in the data on the nature of the STEP failure, and in a few seconds he gave them the answer. "We have approximately two hours to hull failure. It will take us at least eight

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hours at full bore to get up and out of the liquid layers. We don't have enough time to get out."

The people aboard had been selected for a certain steadiness of personality. They all had known that the chances were good for a major disaster. So there was no panic now, only listlessness. Then, one by one, they turned to look at Persus, either directly or by intercom. The sub drifted slowly on, the drones reported their positions, and the crew sat and looked at Persus.

ROBERT A. PERSUS, 52, Ph.D., aeronautical engineering, Wesleyan University, single, commander. Persus was eight years old when he made up his mind to be an astronaut. He was twelve when he realized that being as astronaut was not enough. Something far greater would be needed, something world-shaking, something akin to that done by a Peary, a Lindbergh, an Armstrong. There was in his bones a need to look ahead and see himself doing that which was beyond anything done by any other man. This seemingly childish whim supported years of preparation. He trained himself in every imaginable kind of physical and mental activity. When the Jupiter expedition first came under discussion in the inner circles of the space-travel savants, Persus instantly recognized his destiny: he would be the man to lead the expedition and bring back samples of the core of Jupiter under the Great Red Spot. But definition of the goal did not make it easy. Persus had to cajole, persuade, invent, and fight his way around a vast array of scientific, social, and political obstacles. The unmanned probes showed the difficulties to be greater than had been thought. When the analyses of the problem were in, there seemed no way the expedition could succeed; there was too far to go with the massive equipment needed to dive so deep into the liquid layers of the planet. But Persus persuaded the scientific community to accept the concept of deliberate risk — to build a lightweight submersible and use the STEP catalyst to supply thermal protection, select a design for bare minimum safety instead of the usual maximum, eliminate most safety factors in hull structure, and select a crew of volunteers who appreciated the risk. Then hope for the best. And so he was here, and the assumption of risk had caught up with him. The sub was doomed.

The others sat and looked at him, and Persus said, "Continue to the Spot. We will sample it, take aboard the samples, and start the sub up at a slow speed; maybe it won't break apart. Maybe someday it will be recovered. The samples will be aboard, and we will have

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accomplished most of our mission. Carr, continue on course to the object ahead."

It was not really what the others expected to hear. When there is a leader, as there always is in a group activity, the group somehow expects the leader to solve any problem; there is a tendency to sit back and listen for the answer. So, for a moment, the others continued looking at Persus, as if expecting more. He understood what was in their minds, and he simply looked back at them, without speaking. As his words became reality to them, one at a time they turned back to their boards. In a minute the sub seemed normal.

Faintly, on the scanning screen, a broad general grey shadow appeared, with the bright white shadow of a drone heading right for it. Carr cut back on their speed, manually compensating for a steady current. They pulled to within fifty meters of it, and the screen showed that it plunged to the depths beneath them and leveled off ahead of them. Carr said, "Without the drone we'd have missed it in these currents. I'll take it in a hundred meters from the edge."

Carr began the delicate job of dropping the sub down to the surface. He said, "Might just as well lay it down. If it's solid hydrogen, it won't hurt us, not any more than we've been hurt, anyway." Kranski looked at Carr and shook his head in silent protest against being reminded that disaster was two hours away.

Persus said, "Drop it down parallel to the current, but watch out for any sharp outcroppings. Lay it with the bow up in case we have to get out of here quick."

Messersmith's humor returned. "Going some place, Commander?" It was a small remark, but it brought back normality. The surface beneath them was absorbing the attention of all of them. There was good work to do.

A slight bump, and the sub was down, and all seven looked around with pleased smiles at their accomplishment. The smiles faded as they noticed the distinguishable darkening on the right side of the control room. Moisture was beginning to condense along the entire side of the curved wall. Evans, ever the engineer, looked at the wet region and said, "We ought to leave word somehow that the next time they should design better for thermal integrity and not speed."

Persus said, "Start the sampling servos. He moved slowly at first, heavy in the gravitation, unsure; but as he swung the servos out, his movements smoothed. The others could see the dexterity creep into his actions, and they looked at one another and nodded.

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Kranski was going to be all right.

A blade touched the surface. Kranski pressed the blade against it and then lifted it and tapped it several times. He said, "Metallic, all right."

Persus said, "Yes, metallic hydrogen. See if you can cut out a chunk for density and conductivity measurements out there before we bring it aboard."

Kranski nodded and manipulated his several external arms. He said, "Listen to this. I'm thumping on the surface out there."

Through the hull of the sub they could hear and even feel the series of repetitive thuds as Kranski banged on the surface. Kranski said, "That's a real metallic clang. I thought metallic hydrogen had too low a density to produce a sound like that."

"Get a sample and bring it aboard," said Persus.

Kranski lifted his cutting blade and drove it down. They could hear it from inside, a sharp, clear sound. "It didn't penetrate," said Kranski. He lifted the blade higher and struck again, harder. "Got a quarter of an inch that time." He did it again, then turned to Persus and said, "Commander, let's face it. That's not solid hydrogen out there. I don't know what it is, but it's not hydrogen." He looked at Persus.

Persus said, "Take conductivity in place, then. And keep trying to cut out a chunk."

Kranski nodded and turned back to his board and reached out for his controls. Before he touched anything, two spaced, loud, clear thuds rang through the sub.

Kranski, wide-eyed, stared at his board. Messersmith's jaw dropped. Hoffman gasped. Persus snapped forward and said, "Kranski, did you do that?"

"Hell, no. Nothing moved."

Persus said to Evans, "Your drones?"

Evans sputtered and had trouble getting the words out. "They're twenty meters off the surface."

Persus put both hands on the top of his head, and pressed. No one spoke for another five seconds. In the silence, again, two deliberate thuds rang through the control room. "Hit it twice," Persus said to Kranski. Kranski did so, and immediately there came the two-thud response.

Persus dropped his hands and sat back in his chair. He shook his head and took a deep breath and said. "It's clear there is something intelligent there. But where? Under that shell?" He said to Kranski, "Give them the old shave-and-a-haircut, two-bits signal." Kranski did, and after a two-second delay they got the same signal back, loud

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and clear. "All right," said Persus. "That's it. Messersmith, we've got to work out a way to communicate with them. Norelli, you too. We've got —" he looked at the chronometer on the wall and at the right wall which was now turning a faint white "— about an hour and a half. We need help, and maybe they can give it to us. What do we have to do to talk to them?"

Norelli stared at him and said, "My god, Commander, do you know what you're asking? We haven't the..."

"What are the alternatives?"

There was silence, and Norelli nodded slowly. He said, "Let's see. This thumping thing is hopeless for conveying significant information. We've got to get them on a computer, somehow, with some sort of signal. But radio isn't the answer." He turned to Evans and snapped his fingers. "Your drone sonar sensor and transmitter. The impedance already matches the medium we're in. If we press the sub's sensor on the surface, we can use sound waves. We might even use voice to talk to them, if that will do any good."

Persus started to tell Johnny Carr what to do, but the sub was already moving in a slight roll, the bow coming down. In a minute it was done, and Norelli was holding a microphone and saying over and over, "HELLO, HELLO, HELLO." When he stopped, there was a series of thuds matching the number of hello's. Messersmith looked helplessly at Persus. "You see the problem? They hear us, but how do they make sense out of what they hear? How do we make sense out of those damn thumps?" He shook his head.

Persus said, "That's got to be a dome, and there's got to be intelligent beings in it. We've got to get in there somehow. We've got to let them know about our predicament. Norelli, can't you give them a recognizable signal, a symbol for the number *pi*, or some other universal constant? Won't that get us started?"

"If we had a couple of months we might break through that way. But it's a terrible problem."

"Break in," said Johnny Carr.

Persus began to ignore the remark, then he turned to Kranski and said, "Try to break in. Use your gear carefully, but do the best you can to try to get through that dome. Norelli, while he's doing that, keep transmitting the word 'help' over and over." He looked at Carr and gave him the okay sign with one hand.

Kranski said, "You know what the pressure is out there? Suppose ..."

"Stop supposing and do it. Now. Start now. Norelli, get on it." Kranski and Norelli quickly turned

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to their jobs. Persus sagged back in his chair, feeling very tired in the grip of the heavy gravitation. After fifteen minutes Persus said, "Any other ideas?"

Norelli said, "You know, I would think they'd get the message. We're hammering on their roof and hollering something. If they're intelligent they might get it."

"They're certainly intelligent," said Hoffman. "We're just not giving them enough to get a handle on."

"They'd better get it soon," said Carr. "Can't you improve on the message?" Norelli said, "I've been trying to think of something, but you can't beat good old repetition to get a message through." His recorder continued to broadcast "help" as he talked to the others. Kranski adjusted the programming of his servos, and he was the first to see a new oscilloscope trace.

"Look at that." Kranski leaned forward in his chair to tune the trace and almost sagged out of his chair in the heavy gravitation. "They're sending. They're sending in sonic frequencies, in a repetitive pattern, just like us."

Some thuds sounded in the sub. After listening, Norelli said, "Get it? The same as us. They're pounding on the roof and putting out a sonic pulse. They're intelligent, all right."

After a moment's silence Evans said, "Just what have we accomplished?" The silence grew black. No one could think of a thing to say or do.

Evans laboriously pulled a pad of paper over and began to write on it. Most of the others watched the oscilloscope and listened, but after a few minutes of monotony they began to watch Evans; he was the only one doing anything. Evans would look up at a crew member, write a bit, look up again, and so on. Carr understood fist. He said, "Evans, what in the hell are you doing?"

"What? Oh, nothing. Just making some notes."

"Evans, are you writing our obituaries?"

The others gasped. "What?" "Oh, Don." "How could you?" But it was Persus who laughed. He slumped back in his chair and roared. They all turned to look at him, and Carr, the nearest, unsnapped his straps and awkwardly stepped to his chair in concern. Persus kept laughing and trying to speak, but at first he could not make himself understood. Then through the roars of laughter they heard the word, "obits, obits," then, "while we watch." He calmed a little and said, choking, "Evans, you're a pip. Here you calmly write out our obits to sort of tidy things up. That's got to be a new high in

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neatness." He laughed on, in a more controlled manner now. The others watched him, fascinated. No one had ever heard him laugh aloud before. Carr went back to his chair and began to chuckle. Hoffman giggled, and Kranski laughed, and then Messersmith began to roar as loud as Persus had. In a few seconds the entire crew was helpless with laughter, even Evans. They laughed until they were weak, and could laugh no more. They sat back, exhausted, wiping the tears from their eyes. As the last of the laughter faded, they became aware of a new sound, a whirring sound, one they had not heard a minute earlier because of the laughter.

They listened, puzzled, looking at each other questioningly.

So loud it startled them, Kranski yelled, "Drilling."

"What?"

"They're drilling, that's what they're doing. Drilling through the roof."

They listened, and Persus said, "That might be just what it is. Norelli, Messersmith, can you get a fix on the position? We want to know where it'll come out."

They got on it and triangulated the sound source to a point exactly beneath where Kranski had cut a small hole in the metal. Messersmith glanced at the printout and "Do you realize that metal must have been about ten meters thick where they're drilling?" He made a few more readings and said. "They're coming up at the rate of about three meters per minute. They'll be through in another two and a half minutes. Then what do we do?"

Evans said, "We haven't stopped to think of who they are or how they got there. What's a metal dome doing in a place like this? How can intelligent creatures evolve under a thousand kilometers of liquid hydrogen?" He stopped, and looked around a little wildly. "Just what's going to come up out of that hole?"

Hoffman said, "Well, maybe they're just hungry." She shrugged in the silence that followed and looked at the widening region of white on the wall. A distinct chill filled the control room. Hoffman, Messersmith, and Norelli were nearest the wall, and they could feel the heat pour from their exposed skin to the wall.

Persus said, "Evans, focus the scanner on the region where Kranski made his cut. Get the best resolution you can. Kranski, stand by with your blade and cutters. I don't know what they're doing, but they may need help at it." Persus and the others watched as Evans sharpened their view of the nick in the metal.

Evans said, "Look at that.

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There's a fine mesh overlaying the solid metal down there. Didn't notice it before. See it? Kranski's cut through the mesh and turned back a little piece of it."

Persus said, "Kranski, see if you can peel up a piece of that mesh. And watch for the drill. Evans, Messersmith, let us know just before the drill breaks through."

Immediately, Messersmith said, "Ten seconds now."

In the silence of the control room they could hear the louder whirring of the drill. When it broke through, it was not what they expected. It was a tiny thing, about a half centimeter in diameter, and it protruded about two centimeters above the surface. Just beneath the sharp cap at the tip was a cylinder of appearance different from the rest of the assembly. As they watched, the rotation slowed and stopped. Then it started again, and stopped, and started and stopped.

Messersmith deciphered it. "Screw it off, Kranski, screw it off and bring it aboard."

Kranski did not wait for a confirming order from Persus. He quickly moved a grasper to the drill and rotated it, but the grasper slipped off.

Persus said, "I suggest counterclockwise." When Kranski reversed his rotation, the top centimeter and a half came off in his grasper. Persus said, "Not bad. Small hole like that means they can control the pressure easier. They must be sensitive to pressure something like the way we are."

Kranski said, "We'll have to test it before we bring it aboard. We don't know how it will react to an oxygen atmosphere."

Persus glanced at the white wall and said, "Forget it. Bring it right in."

Kranski nodded, and in three minutes the object was in the control room. Persus, puffing with exertion, moved to the table and warmed the object and inspected it. He turned it and poked it gently with tweezers. It was a coil of metal foil, a centimeter high and half a centimeter thick. Persus began to unwind it, and the first three centimeters were blank. But then they saw two columns of notations, side by side, running down the length. On the left column the first entry was a tiny arc, concave down, and in a corresponding position in the right column was a dot and a dash. Beneath the first entry was another arc, concave up, and in the corresponding position was a dash and a dot. The third entry was a full circle with a corresponding dot dash, dash dot. Messersmith read no further. "Hieroglyphs," he said. "Picture writing keyed to a binary code." He quickly unrolled a meter of the foil to show a large number

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of geometrical shapes, lines, angles, curves, and combinations, all keyed to the dot-dash system. They had a Rosetta stone.

"Program it," said Persus, "and hurry."

"We don't have to program it," said Messersmith. "We can pass it through the scanner and store it, as is. Wait, though." His eyes lit up, and he smiled and ran his hands through his hair. "The program we want is to key this binary language to English. Then all we have to do is talk, and the output will be in binary. Their input in binary will come out as English. By god, those people..."

"Program it," said Persus. "Use Evans, Norelli, any one of us. We've got to tell those people we have a problem here."

It took twenty minutes. Persus said to Norelli, "Tell them our ship is damaged."

To aid the program in the early stages of the use of pictures to convey information, Norelli used simplified and stilted English. He said into the microphone, "Here is the ship. Here are the people. Here is the ship with the people in it. Here is the ship with the people in it resting on top of your dome, and here is the ship with damage." He stopped and they waited. The white region on the wall was large, and in the silence of waiting for an answer they heard the first creakings from the thermal and pressure stresses that would soon crack the sub.

The answer when it came showed full understanding. Norelli used both the oscilloscope and the speaker so that they saw the pictographs take form and heard the stilted English describe them. The pictograph of the sub was repeated with a different degree of damage each time. Norelli put it simply. "They are asking us for the nature and extent of the damage. And Dave, that symbol, with no spoken comment, is a question mark; build it into the program. Now, how do we tell them we have a deteriorated STEP blanket on one side?"

"Show a plate peeling away from the sub, but that'll be misleading. Our problem is cold, not structure, at least so far. How do we show them the cold is encroaching on one region only and the resulting stresses weaken the hull?"

Messersmith snapped his fingers. "Their tape shows a stylized picture of a flame, and another with a bar through it to show 'no heat.' Will that do if we supply some English words?"

"Try it," said Persus. "Show the no-heat symbol in conjunction with a plate peeling away from the sub. Tie it into the computer with additional vocabulary. We'll talk to them yet."

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Messersmith had the message out in thirty seconds, and Norelli broadcast it. There was a wait of three seconds before the reply came back. Messersmith said, "They've got a better computer than we have. Well, let's put this one on the speaker and see if it makes sense to us. Here goes."

The speaker, in Norelli's voice, relayed the message, and it gave Norelli an eerie feeling to hear the words of another people coming out in his own voice. "You can reduce your heat loss problem by peeling off the outer grid from the surface on which your ship lies and wrapping it around the damaged section, impress electrical pressure on the grid, and it will protect you from heat loss."

Persus said, "Kranski, cut us a piece of that grid big enough to wrap around the whole control room region. Carr, stand by to find a way to fasten it and to make any other movements Kranski needs. Norelli, tell them 'thanks.' Then tell them who we are, what we look like, where we're from, how we got here, the works. If we don't get out of here, at least we'll leave a record that we've been here. Maybe a few years from now another ship'll be down... but let's get to work. It's getting cold in here. We're running out of time."

Kranski and Carr worked together to cut out a large piece of the mesh. Once the cut was started, it wasn't hard to continue. They quickly found that by positioning the blades correctly, Carr could shift the entire sub in the direction of the cut to be made, and in this way they made the first slice of about twelve meters. The cut was not perfectly straight, but it could not be helped. Then, a right turn and another cut in the shape of an arc of about thirty-eight meters. Then, another twelve-meter cut, and then the final thirty-eight meters. The section of the grid was free.

Using the blades and pincers, Kranski lifted the grid, dropped it nearly in place and said, "I can't get it around the center of the sub so I can hold the two edges together. The arms are not long enough."

"Roll the sub," said Persus to Carr.

"Can't do it that way. The other edge rolls away. We need something to hold it while we roll the sub."

They looked at each other. The control room had grown very cold, and they could all feel the damp chill strongly. In the silence, the creaks of the stressed sub structure were loud and frightening. Evans said, "The drones. We'll use a drone to hold it."

"Do it," said Persus. "Quick."

Norelli stopped transmitting the

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history of the expedition while Evans took over to control the drone. And he was able to hold the grid to the sub as Carr rolled it. Kranski finally said, "Got it. I'm not sure it'll stay, but I've got it. I'll turn the current on now." He adjusted the rheostat to produce twelve volts and then turned and watched with Carr to see if the sensors showed any result. Nothing, so he increased the voltage to twenty-four. Nothing, and thirty-six produced nothing. The control room was frigid although the heaters were at maximum output. The strain gages and the heat-flow sensors in the outer walls showed no change. Kranski shook his head, and spun the dial to five hundred volts. Instantly the heat sensors showed a reversal of direction of heat flow. In a moment the creaking of stressed structural members increased to the sounds of tortured twisting of metal.

"Back it off," said Persus.

Kranski cut it back to two hundred and fifty volts. The cry of the metal subsided, and the heat sensors continued to show a cessation in the outward flow of heat. "That may be about it," said Kranski.

Persus nodded. "Keep your eye on it. Norelli, continue with your message to them. We'll tell them in a few minutes whether or not their mesh has stopped our heat loss. Continue taking readings. We may get out of this after all."

The routine settled in, and a few rivulets of water began to run from the thick white coating on the wall of the control room. Hoffman saw them first and pointed them out to Evans, and they smiled inanely at the wet wall.

Norelli said to Persus, "Finished transmitting our message. Now, I'd like to get some information from them. How about asking them how the hell they happen to be there?" There was a chorus of "yes's" from a crew that suddenly felt it had no problems at all.

"Do it," said Persus.

Norelli put on the necesary request, and they sat back and waited. The wait was longer than usual, and Norelli, puzzled, looked at Persus. Persus shrugged, and checked the control room to see that everyone was busy. All but Norelli and Evans were at work controlling their boards. And then the computer board lit up and the voice output started.

"Our physical appearance is similar to yours, same bilateral symmetry. We are shorter, thicker, from living in this gravitation for ... seven hundred years; it has changed our race. We come from the planet ... in the ... system. Our Sun aged. We had a thousand years to do something, and so we built a

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spaceship that could travel indefinitely, or that could land somewhere if we found a suitable planet. Our race traveled for about seventy years, and we decided to enter this system to inspect the planets here. As we were passing the largest of the planets, incredibly, our propulsion system failed. We travel on electromagnetic energy, and we had a breakdown that allowed our ship to be drawn into the gravitational sphere of this big planet. We were able to cushion the fall, but we could not prevent it. Slowly, we fell through the clouds, through the liquid layers, right to the metal core. Here we have been for seven hundred years. We have often tried to lift off, but we have not been able to break away from the gravitational hold of this planet. Our ship was not designed for such power. We have been able to move it now and then, but we cannot break out. CAN YOU HELP US?"

Persus snapped out of it first. "Did I hear right? They're in a...a spaceship? The whole race? One spaceship? Norelli, ask them how big their ship is."

The answer came back, "Forty thousand kilometers long, thirteen kilometers wide, two kilometers thick."

Persus said, "Are we certain of their use of the term 'kilometer'?"

"Yes. Their tape had dimensions in terms of Jupiter's diameter. Those dimensions are being transmitted right, as far as we know. You agree, Dave?"

"Yes. The translation is right. So unless they're lying to us, that's it." He shook his head in wonderment. "The Great Red Spot is the top of a Taylor column in Jupiter's atmosphere, *caused by a spaceship.*"

They looked at each other and then quickly looked away to stare at the floor, the walls, the panels, anything except another human face. Each had to compose himself to slowly let reality slip into his mind a little at a time. To take it all in at once was too much, and Hoffman went too fast. She gasped and covered her face with her hands, and her whole body began to tremble. As her sobs became audible, Persus said to her, "Sharon, can you preserve under ambient conditions a sample of the supercritical hydrogen helium outside? We'll want to take it up."

She hardly heard him, but his use of her first name for the first time penetrated into the red fog that was closing around her mind, and she lifted her face and looked at the screen and said, "Wha... what?"

"Take and preserve a sample of the medium. Do it now."

She looked vaguely at her board, and Kranski said, "Here, I'll help you." And so Hoffman

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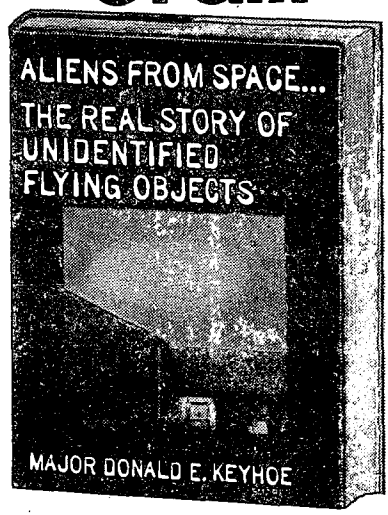
snapped out of it, putting off to the future a full grasp of what had happened.

Persus settled back in his chair, totally relaxed, totally at peace. His assimilation was complete, and he had brought the series of events to the point where he could think of it as a problem to be solved. So his mind raced, thinking cleanly and clearly and simply. "All right," he said to Norelli. "Tell them we are leaving because we must. Tell them we will be back, perhaps in a year. When we come back, we may want to take a few of their people out of their ship and back to Earth with us to help us figure out a way to lift their ship off. Or we may have some other ideas. See what they say."

Norelli passed on the message and waited and said to Persus, "They can think of nothing else right now. They wish us long life and success. They will be ready when we return."

Persus nodded and said to Evans, "Leave a drone lying here, and tell them we've done it." He saw the puzzled expression on Evans' face, and he shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know. It just seems we ought to leave something here. All right, tell them good-by, for now." He looked around and said, "Johnny, take it up."

The biggest coverup of all!



"If Major Keyhoe's book didn't sufficiently substantiate his claim that the United States Air Force knows that UFOs are spacecraft from a more advanced world—and is deliberately concealing the truth from the public by censoring reports and discrediting witnesses—this somber warning might sound a trifle ridiculous. But it rings disturbingly true."
—*Christian Science Monitor.*

$7.95

DOUBLEDAY

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JOHN CLUTE

Books

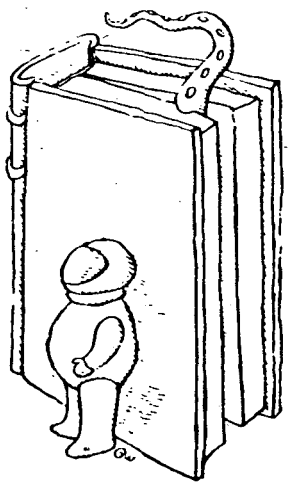
Space Relations, Donald Barr, Charterhouse, $6.95

Star Smashers of the Galaxy Rangers, Harry Harrison Putnam, $5.95

Tetrasomy Two, Oscar Rossiter, Doubleday, $5.95

Commune 2000 AD, Mack Reynolds, Bantam, $.95

Our Children's Children, Clifford D. Simak, Putnam $5.95



From the thin red line of social scientists who buck Professor Skinner's dreams of manipulation for the good of our tabula rasa, we learn that as human beings we sense and comprehend our world through an interlocking network of sets (or conventions) that preselect input and shape output (the way a genre does), so that if only the world would stop changing, as once upon a time in Arcadia, we could live in a constant conformity to ourselves. For a deep appeal of the Golden Age (as of space opera) lies in the lure of homology: in the identity of self and world.

But the Golden Age has passed as childhood passes, and our world is change on change unceasing, so that for those of us sane or unsaintly enough to tolerate input-violations, life is an unceasing savagery to the state of the self; indeed, so constant are all levels of change in the 20th century that we scarcely know how it might just feel to simply be ....

Though we do read a lot.

Before the novel of mimesis died in 1914, along with the finest flower of our chivalry, its sanguine stance of openness to the world it claimed to mirror had long dominated prose fiction; rendering

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the world as it actually *was* seemed not only an attainable goal, but a moral one as well. But the roof fell in. Claims that human perception actually embraced and retransmitted the true "reality" of the world could no longer survive our knowledge that we brought ourselves as tools to the job, and that ultimately the job was ourselves. Consequently, most significant non-generic fiction today deals in some way with that mutual opacity (or alienation) between self and world which killed verisimilitude as a goal for adults, the only place mimesis is still to be found au naturel being best seller or roman à clef porn, where it lies barefaced.

And most generic fiction, whether written or filmed, seems to have taken over a job handled by the novel for 150 years: the dream of mimesis that self and world are mutually comprehensible: the self-conforming safeness of a created world whose fundament is visible, mainly through the actions of a kinetic hero (me) who wraps things up. For despite its progressivist rhetoric, despite its thematic dealings with extrapolated futures, generic science fiction is deeply conservative in form, hence its appeal, hence its deep resistance to modernist (New Wave) attempts at subversion.

Nowhere is this clearer than in space opera, where a rhetoric of outlandishness (anything goes *on the other planet*) operates within strict conventions of transparency, *pace* Delany, viz. Tubb. Transparent to his kinetic role, the hero is precisely what the plot demands, with no extraneous opacity of selfhood to gum up the works. Unencumbered by social feedbacks, his actions are just as transparent — and also determined, clear-edged, unquestionable, and tyrannous. If he has amnesia (and he often has amnesia) the point is only underlined, for his inability to know himself is no permanent condition of being, but only a plot-trope soon to be unravelled, usually with a bang: for in space opera, self-knowledge attends (and is in fact identical to) knowledge of the true shape of the plot which is changing the universe; the hero's recovery of his memory confirms our nostalgic intuition that the universe made transparent through the unravelled plot is homologous with that discovered self of his.

(Or else why read space opera?)

Nor do the outlandish worlds he visits or inhabits turn out to be modernist or picaresque enclaves of existential dubiety, either. Just the opposite, for they are penetrable. A conservative author will typically approach the problem of envisioning a new world (Tahiti or Trantor) by constructing a dramaturgy in

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which power is made visible, after the Enlightenment belief that *energy is available.* Knowledge is power. In a space opera, control of the lines of power illuminates the world, making it comprehensible to the hero at the reins, and to the reader. The typical outland of a space opera is set up to make Enlightenment takeover as easy as possible: it is typically authoritarian, with a homogeneous elite; its lines of power narrow neatly and cleanly to a small grouping at the top known to the hero, who (especially if he's amnesic) often turns out to be the final boss in any case. There is no quicksand of powerlessness, for the world is you.

Surprisingly, newcomer Donald Barr's poetry-filled, acerbic, linguistically foregrounded *Space Relations: A Slightly Gothic Interplanetary Tale* adheres rather more closely to the above delineation of space opera than many technically more straightforward efforts from veterans of the genre, while at the same time making nods to other universes of discourse. An administrator and educationist entirely new to fiction of any sort, Mr. Barr is nevertheless clearly familiar with this genre, which he has refused to spoof or to undercut; his literate intensity has gone to increase transparency, not to subvert it. I'd adduce the secret of his success as being love.

Plump complacent John Armbruster Craig, interstellar diplomat, is returning from moderate success at the Betelgeuse Conference when space pirates capture his ship and sell him into abject slavery on dread Kossar where, refusing to service an old homosexual artistocrat, he's relegated to the coal mines. After some rousing adventures, during which he saves the life of his beautiful, sexually avaricious owner, Lady Morgan Stanley, he's seconded to her bed, where his education as a kinetic hero takes a new turn, as she's a sadist. Fear makes his penis rise: he's transparently fitting himself to take on the whole world. Craig and his mistress fall in love with each other, but after a year or so he discovers an ominous alien artifact in a cave, proof that there's an inimical civilization somewhere out there, and realizes that he must escape to Earth and start saving mankind, which he does.

On Earth, the new leaner tougher smarter more decisive Craig rises meteorically in the diplomatic corps, at the same time pushing through concordats to array homo sapiens against the enemy; he also introduces a resolution banning slavery. Eventually he returns with plenipotentiary status to Kossar, where he had never revealed his name, even to Lady Morgan, and has some more

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adventures in the course of reshaping the planet which had reshaped him. Slavery is abolished, and the Lady Morgan becomes his wife. Mankind will surely triumph. The book ends with a poem about sex.

In the Tannhauser myth, which this story retells (or so the dust jacket assures us), the hero gains the world (the Mount of Venus) only to lose his soul, good solid stuff to be sure. In *Space Relations* John Craig gains the world (a conflation of Kossar itself and Lady Morgan) and finds that it *is* his soul. To ensure the reader's awareness of this bit of Enlightenment good news, Barr twists the novel structurally so as to embed Craig's period of slavery into a loaded flashback context; the consequent explosion into self-ownership, self-knowledge, great prestige, and the present tense is so pointed a simultaneity as to be virtually didactic. Add to that the extroverted, imperial-we, out-front sexual shenanigans, which the author seems clearly to nominate as homology's binding-glue in his text, and the result is a joyous dream: in which you bite the apple and yet it remains whole.

The sex in *Space Relations* does come close to burning through the genre, but Barr implants it carefully, and the book holds together; Harry Harrison, on the other hand, shovels a lot of sex into his new space opera parody, *Star Smashers of the Galaxy Rangers* and it pretty much rips the book apart.

The first two paragraphs of *Star Smashers* sufficiently sum up his line of attack, and demonstrate the corrosive effect of misapplied sex:

> "Come on, Jerry," Chuck called out cheerfully from inside the rude shed that the two chums had fixed up as a simple laboratory. "The old particle accelerator is fired up and rarin' to go!"
>
> "I'm fired up and rarin' to go too," Jerry whispered into the delicate rose ear of lovely Sally Goodfellow, his lips smacking their way along her jaw towards her lips, his insidious hands stealthily encircling her waist.

In the first paragraph quoted, we seem to be haring off on an enjoyable slapstick burlesque of — say — E. E. Smith's Skylark sequence, though Harrison could well have another writer in mind, or perhaps just preWar space opera in general — the sort of story whose Yankee hero (invariably Anglo-Saxon, invariably a genius level tinkerer-inventor) invents a space-drive-weapon-radio-waffle iron and flits off into the galaxy, establishing Man's supremacy among those good natives he does not kill by accident, and totally eliminating the bad.

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Plot-wise, *Star Smashers of the Galaxy Rangers* follows this Skylarkian routine faithfully enough, and scores a good number of interesting points (though with affection) against its rightwing tendencies, its lunatic insensitivity to lifeforms (ie Jews) and life styles (social democracy, say) not found in smalltown America circa 1930, and its outdated generic shortcuts in general.

But in the second quoted paragraph, something is already going a little sour. It would be very hard to deny that E. E. Smith's version of the American female is a misogynist's dream of intrusive fatuity, and that his heroines have dated even more badly than the plastic Edisons they natter at. All the same, however, it only travesties his kind of space opera, fatally distorting its nature, to transform his typical female ament (Sally Goodfellow in *Star Rangers*) into a sexual being, albeit a joky one. A good parodist would illuminate Sally Goodfellow's *lack* of sexual characteristics, but he would not do so by making her into something the heroes of the Skylark sequence (and possibly Doc Smith himself) could only possibly conceive of as a slut.

Introducing his *Parodies: An Anthology From Chaucer to Beerbohm and After*, Dwight Macdonald describes the form "as an intuitive kind of literary criticism, ... It is Method acting, since a successful parodist must live himself, imaginatively, into his parodee." The concept of the parody as a hostile review, insultingly couched, does not survive such familiarity with the form that Macdonald's collection offers, and it is here that *Star Rangers* shows a certain misdirected haste, diminishingly. Sally Goodfellow's intrusive tits are a fatal slip into burlesque editorializing; likewise her riposte to Chuck and Jerry when they claim noble motives for going off to war again: "'Nuts! You do it for the old *machismo*, ...'"

Sex also crops up in new writer Oscar Rossiter's *Tetrasomy Two* (Doubleday—and you'd think they could have given him some good advice about that title—$5.95), and we all have a reasonable amount of fun, though this amiable little tale, ill-balanced between its two main themes, does rather break down in the hokum apocalypse of its final paragraphs. In the main theme (which the author slights) a hospitalized human vegetable turns out to be an amoral, telepathic superbeing, who intends to eliminate the solar system in the process of gaining sufficient energy (and apparently karma) to visit his pals in Cassiopeia. In the secondary

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story, the superbeing telepathically forces his doctor's nurse into a state of sexual receptiveness; gratefully the doctor, who perilously resembles Woody Allen in *Play it Again, Sam*, gets into her pants, the world well lost. This takes most of the book, and shouldn't have. Muffled by lack of focus; otherwise a promising debut.

Predatory aliens out of early Van Vogt invade Earth 500 years from now, driving mankind into the desperate expedient of returning en masse through time to the present, confronting the President of the United States with serious logistical problems, for there are two billion of them. Informed by newspaper reporters and his trusty radio of the incursion, the President discusses things with Press Secretary, but is eventually gotten off the hook on learning that *Our Children's Children* intend to keep on going back through time, and have only stopped in 1974 to pick up some groceries. They leave a few trillion dollars worth of diamonds with him — the USA being the only nation they can trust, cf. p. 185 — to pay for the goods, and prepare to disappear, along with the aliens, who are on their track, but who — being natural hunters — are much more interested in dinosaurs, and are therefore bound for a different time zone.

Thus Clifford D. Simak, daydreaming through the afternoon of his career in one of the silliest and most absent-minded novels of recent years. His memorious readers will surely pick the thing up in search of the Simak we have all loved and admired, but they will find he has been sleeping. Some Prince should give him a kiss.

Mack Reynolds' *Commune 2000 AD* adds a few speculations on disaffection and the lust for power to his earlier and much finer utopian discourse, *Looking Backward, From the Year 2000*, but finds itself trapped in the utopia format, leading to some pretty ludicrous plotting. Reynolds needs a naif to whom explanations can be made and comes up with an academic whom the establishment sends off to the counter-culture communes in search of sedition. Each commune shows our hero a new sexual position, and imparts information that any child in the world of *Looking Backward* would be familiar with from the age of five. Granted the utopia format requires a visitor who enters into dialogues with representatives of the ideal society, so as to illustrate its claims to perfection; but Theodore Swain's skull is simply too thick to sustain life.

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Gahan Wilson

"At least they're a quiet bunch!"

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A new Duckworth story, in which the great biochemist concocts a drug that improves reading speed and memory to unheard of levels. Any editor's dream; or is it?

Elephants Sometimes Forget

by LARRY EISENBERG

It was a spendid day, a day to cherish. The new annex to the chemistry building had just been completed and was now to be dedicated with all of the pomp and circumstance the university could muster. As I looked about the academic assembly room, I was overwhelmed by the profusion of purples, golds and crimsons of doctoral hoods and gowns. But most resplendent of all was our president, the grand old man of chemistry, Alexander Hinkle.

There had been much buzzing when it was announced that the new annex would be called Hinkle Hall. One or two dissidents had argued that the name of Lavoisier would be more appropriate, but this talk had soon subsided. I had tried to ferret out some of Duckworth's thoughts on this question, but the great biochemist had simply shaken his head and refused to say.

When the dedicatory speeches were over, President Hinkle ascended the three oak steps to the velvet-draped podium, tears in his red-veined eyes. He stood there, legs apart, nodding and waving his arms in courtly acknowledgment, although there was singularly little noise from the assemblage. After a while, he sat down.

And so it was with some puzzlement that I found myself summoned to the president's office, side by side with Duckworth, later that afternoon. There were no warm greetings, no preliminary chitchat, just a direct aggressive statement by our president.

"Duckworth," he said, jaw outthrust, "you two fellows were clearly eying me during the ceremonies this morning. What was on your minds?"

"Just deep emotion," I said hastily.

"I was talking to Dr. Duck-

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worth," snapped President Hinkle.

"There *was* something on my mind," said Duckworth. "Admiration, sentiment, nostalgia."

Hinkle frowned.

"Nostalgia for what?"

"For the days when a man had to retire or die before a building was named after him."

The Hinkle nose, an impressive corrugated bundle of veins and red epidermis, flamed to an even deeper hue. I trembled for the outburst I knew was coming. And then it suddenly subsided.

"Duckworth," said the president sadly, "you're nasty, plain nasty."

He dipped into a sheaf of papers on his massive desk and swiveled them past the clutter of mementos that were strewn like boulders across the mahogany surface.

"Do you see what I'm faced with?" he asked. "Every goddamn decision comes to this desk. I'm overworked, understaffed, and yet you begrudge me a tiny moment of pleasure. For shame, Duckworth."

"For shame," I echoed, and Duckworth dug his elbow into my side.

"Perhaps I was a little insensitive," said Duckworth. "But I haven't forgotten who it was that took me from that tiny girl's college in the Berkshires and brought me here. Nor am I unaware of the tons of grant applications, budget items, and other administrative bric-a-brac that you have to read and digest each day."

"That isn't the half of it," said President Hinkle. "I even took that speed-reading course that's been talked about so much, and although I've upped my reading speed to two thousand words a minute, I still can't keep up with my paper work."

"I'm genuinely sorry if I spoiled the dedication for you," said Duckworth. "Maybe I *was* being overly judgmental." He stroked his wispy beard thoughtfully. "Perhaps I can make it up to you."

"Maybe we can both make it up to you," I said. "I've heard that money is being raised to commission a marble bust..."

"That isn't exactly what I had in mind," interrupted Duckworth. "I've worked out something that may relieve you of your impossible burden."

"I'm too young to retire," cried Hinkle.

"I was referring to a way of simultaneously improving your reading speeds and your memory to unheard of levels."

President Hinkle's eyebrows elevated.

"How does it work?" he asked cajolingly.

"As you well know," said Duckworth, "disulfide bonds on

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the presynaptic end of nerve fibers play a role in the release of messenger packets to adjoining nerve fibers."

"Don't these messenger packets transmit the nerve impulse from one fiber to another?" I asked.

"Exactly," said Duckworth. "Thus the disulfide bonds, by determining the release of these packets, can control the manner and rate at which nerve impulses are transmitted."

"But what has this got to do with reading speed?"

"Simply this," said Duckworth. "A properly administered sulfide infusion to the retina enlarges the ends of the nerve fibers in the optic bundles. In this way a kind of long-term memory is formed which enables the storing of chemically coded information."

"I get it," I said. "Even though you view the printed lines more quickly, you can remember what you saw for a very long period of time."

"Indefinitely," said Duckworth. "As a matter of fact, if you gentlemen wish to come to my laboratories, I'll demonstrate just when I mean."

I assisted President Hinkle to his feet and followed deferentially behind him as with broken-kneed strides he wobbled after Duckworth's flying figure. In the Duckworth sanctum sanctorum, his animal room, was a little blindfolded capuchin monkey. Duckworth gently placed the little fellow in a chair and secured him firmly. Then he arranged a series of lettered blocks in a single line on a table before the monkey.

"You will note," said Duckworth, "that the blocks form a nonsense alignment of ten letters. I will now remove the blindfold and allow the monkey to see the blocks for sixty seconds. I will then restore the blindfold, scramble the letters, and remove the blindfold once again. This time the monkey has to rearrange the blocks into the original pattern. If he does so, he gets a ripe banana as a reward."

"I can see why you use a nonsense word," I said. "The monkey might remember a real word."

"Please keep still," said President Hinkle. "The experiment is very well defined. Let's see what the little beggar does."

We watched with bated breath as the blindfold was removed and then, sixty seconds later, replaced. We even helped Duckworth scramble the blocks. When the blindfold was removed for the second time, the capuchin rummaged about among the blocks and sorted them out in a half-hearted manner.

"Pshaw," said President Hinkle ruefully. "What a stupid little beast."

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"I don't think so," said Duckworth. "Let's repeat the experiment after making one small addition."

He picked up the monkey, cradled him gently in his arms and then, with the swiftest of gestures, placed drops in each of his eyes. The blocks were now arranged in a new nonsense structure, and the experiment was repeated. This time the capuchin, performing with assurance and speed, replaced the blocks in exactly the proper pattern.

"Duckworth," cried President Hinkle, his voice throbbing with emotion. "You've done an incredible thing. I can't tell you how impressed I am."

"Amazing," I said. "Have you tried it on a human subject as yet?"

"No," said Duckworth, "although I've satisfied myself that there is little likelihood of damaging effects."

"In that case," I said grandly, "I would like to volunteer to be your first human subject."

"Maybe," said Duckworth. "I still have a few more tests to perform before we take that chance. If the results confirm my beliefs, you'll have the drops within a few weeks' time."

Duckworth was as good as his word. He gave me a precious distillate of his sulfide drops and cautioned me to place one in each eye upon arising each morning.

"Don't forget," he cautioned. "Only one in each eye."

"I'll be like an elephant," I said confidently. "I'll never forget."

Duckworth shook his head.

"Elephants sometimes forget," he muttered.

Then he clapped his hand to my shoulder and sent me on my way. The workday went smoothly, and I found myself remembering every machine-language statement I wrote into a program. But the acid test came later that evening. After a hurried supper, I picked up several volumes I had always meant to read. Within two hours time, I ran through *Fanny Hill,* Norman Vincent Peale's *Power of Positive Thinking,* and volumes one and two of *Das Kapital.*

Later, as my wife lay abed in her pajamas, hair studded with curlers, I plucked an Agatha Christie novel from her hand, riffled through the pages, and gave her the entire plot in a twinkling, including the ingeniously constructed denouement. As a result, I received a buffet across the ears that made my head ring, and I also had to prepare my own breakfast the following morning.

At the university Duckworth stopped by at my office.

"How did it go?" he asked.

"Good and bad."

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He was quite pleased as I described what had happened, quoting whole chunks of text verbatim. He even chuckled when I indicated what my wife had done to me.

"Splendid," he said. "President Hinkle has been champing at the bit. I'll release a vial of the drops to him, too."

Thereafter I read avidly, going through everything I could lay my hands on. The local library was soon exhausted, and then I systematically assaulted the many levels of stacks at the university. Within a month I had depleted those. In desperation I turned to the illustrated books of my children.

It was just about this time that I became aware of severe shooting pains about the mouth, pains so severe that at times I almost leaped out of my skin. It became apparent to me after a while that these pains reached their peaks of intensity while I was reading, a frightening connection that I was extremely reluctant to make.

At the faculty dining room, one day, I was joined by Duckworth. He was in a high-spirited, jovial mood, which I resented bitterly.

"What on earth are you eating?" he inquired noisily. "Mush? What's going on here? Haven't you noticed that for the same price today, in an unparalleled lunchroom special, you can have a small sirloin steak?"

"I hate steak," I said bitterly, "and I love mush."

"All right," said Duckworth. "But don't be so stuffy about it."

A moment later, our table was blessed with the dour countenance of President Hinkle. He too was carrying a bowl of mush on his tray.

"You too?" asked Duckworth. "Is there a convocation of mush lovers today?"

"Shut up," snapped President Hinkle, and I wanted to reach over and shake his hand.

"Sorry," said Duckworth, "I didn't mean to tread on any toes."

"It's not my toes," said President Hinkle. "It's my damned mouth. It hurts like the very devil and nothing alleviates the pain."

My ears perked up.

"Really? And does it intensify when you read?"

"It does," said President Hinkle. "Why did you ask me that?"

"Because I've the very same symptom. Last night I was going through the volumes of the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Bedtime Lines for Sleepyheads*, and I thought I'd pass out for the pain."

"Have you been to your dentist?" asked President Hinkle.

"Not yet. Should I?"

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He sighed.

"Not if he's as incompetent as mine is. He was unable to tell me a blasted thing. But he did manage to discover that all of my teeth were loose and on the verge of falling out."

I could feel my hair stand on end.

"Falling out, you say?"

"His very words," said President Hinkle somberly. "It gave me a very nasty turn."

"There's no use pretending any more," I said. "I must find out what's going on."

My trip to the dentist proved to be no more successful than President Hinkle's. My dentist confessed that he was completely baffled as to the cause of my condition. But he added, with delighted anticipation of a fat fee, that virtually all of my teeth were loose in the sockets. Without a multithousand dollar course of therapy, he averred, I would soon be reduced to china choppers.

When Duckworth came into the computer lab that evening, he found me with my head buried in my arms. Gently he prodded my neck with a steely forefinger.

"What's amiss, old chum?"

I raised my agonized face.

"It's my goddamned mouth," I said helplessly. "I seem to be on the verge of losing all my teeth, just like President Hinkle."

Duckworth nodded.

"You're not alone," he said somberly. "Virtually half of my subjects at the university who have been using the sulfide drops are suffering from the same complaint."

"Are you telling me that those drops have caused my condition?"

"In an indirect sense they may have," said Duckworth. "I've given the matter considerable thought, and I think I've come up with the answer. For one thing, not all of my subjects suffer from your complaint. Some forty-eight percent of them are able to tear into a rare steak with gusto."

I winced.

"Don't say it," I cried, "The thought of something fibrous and unyielding in my mouth sends me up the wall. Just tell me what those drops of Satan have done to me."

"There wasn't anything poisonous in the drops," said Duckworth. "Just tell me one thing. Did you, as a child, learn to read one word at a time?"

"I did."

"Then your tiny lips moved in perfect synchronism with your tiny eyes, forming the consonants and vowels," said Duckworth.

"Come out with it, Duckworth. Are you trying to tell me that my lips move when I read?"

"Don't take it to heart," said

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Duckworth. "It isn't the same grossly blatant labial of the near-illiterate, but a rather slight twitch of the mouth. What's happened is that now when you can scan an entire page at a glance, your lips try very hard to keep up. Naturally, they can't. As a result, there is enormous fatiguing of the labial muscles and, as you've impressed on me, the most excruciating pain. The loosening of the teeth follows inevitably from all of the violent mouth agitation."

"As the night the day," I muttered. "Ah, Duckworth, you seem to have struck the heart of the matter, and I curse the day I tried your lousy drops. In addition it wounds me to the core to discover that I'm a lip mover, although I'm glad to hear that President Hinkle is one, too."

"If that's any comfort to you."

"Small comfort," I admitted. "But now, how do I rid myself of this accursed skill?"

"By simply not taking the drops," said Duckworth.

"I've a surprise for you," I said. "I haven't taken them in weeks. I neglected to do so one day and found that I had no loss of reading speed. It seems that I've stored up enough disulfide bonds to last me a lifetime."

"In that case," said Duckworth, "a detoxification process is in order. I'll have to concoct something to flush out the excess sulfide accumulation. And soon, you'll be limping along at your old reading speed."

Duckworth was right. Within eight weeks' time, thanks to a witch's brew that he concocted, I had dropped back to my old

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reading rate. What's more, the terrible pains had gone, and the repairs of my loosened teeth were well under way. But the effects on my memory were not too good.

I passed a chap on campus one morning, and although he seemed familiar to me, I couldn't quite place who he was. There were several bushes of red roses in bloom, and he had leaned over to inhale their fragrance.

"Lovely things, aren't they?" he said.

"Indeed they are. I say, old chap, you'll have to forgive me. I can't quite recall your name."

"Duckworth," he said between clenched teeth, "Emmett Duckworth. Does that seem familiar?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "But your detoxifying potion has played havoc with my memory. But it's had one salutary effect."

"Really? What's that?"

"As you recall, I'd read everything published in the Western World including the Silver Library—for Tiny Tots. And I'd retained total recall of every word. Consequently, I no longer had anything to read but the daily press. But now I'm free again, free to browse once more through the immortal pages of Jacqueline Susann."

Duckworth shuddered.

"Ah, to hell with it," I said. "As you once pointed out to me, even elephants sometimes forget."

And then, arms about each other's shoulders, we sauntered over to the faculty dining room, where, I had heard, the sirloin steak special was once again upon the menu.

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This is the first of two superior fantasies we have from Tom Reamy, who has sold to *Orbit* and *Nova*. Mr. Reamy writes: "I worked in aerospace most of my adult life (13 years) until the bottom fell out and I got laid off. You'd think with a background like that I'd be writing hard science fiction instead of rural fantasies, but I find myself incapable of doing so."

Twilla

by TOM REAMY

Twilla Gilbreath blew into Miss Mahan's life like a pink butterfly wing that same day in early December that the blue norther dropped the temperature forty degrees in two hours. Mr. Choate, the principal, ushered Twilla and her parents into Miss Mahan's ninth-grade homeroom shortly after the tardy bell rang. She had just checked the roll: all seventeen ninth graders were present except for Sammy Stocker who was in the Liberal hospital having his appendix removed. She was telling the class how nice it would be if they sent a get-well card when the door opened.

"Goooood morning, Miss Mahan," Mr. Choate smiled cheerfully. He always smiled cheerfully first thing in the morning, but soured as the day wore on. You could practically tell time by Mr. Choate's mouth. "We have a new ninth grader for you this morning, Miss Mahan. This is Mr. and Mrs. Gilbreath and their daughter, Twilla."

Several things happened at once. Miss Mahan shook hands with the parents; she threw a severe glance at the class when she heard a snigger — but it was only Alice May Turner, who would probably giggle if she were being devoured by a bear; and she had to forcibly keep her eyebrows from rising when she got a good look at Twilla. Good Lord, she thought, and felt her smile falter.

Miss Mahan had never in her life, even when it was fashionable for a child to look like that, seen anyone so perfectly ... pink and ... doll-like. She wasn't sure why she got such an impression of pinkness, because the child was dressed in

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yellow and had golden hair (*that's* the color they mean when they say golden hair, she thought with wonder) done in, of all things, drop curls, with a big yellow bow in back. Twilla looked up at her with a sweet radiant sunny smile and clear periwinkle-blue eyes.

Miss Mahan detested her on sight.

She thought she saw, when Alice May giggled, the smile freeze and the lovely eyes dart toward the class, but she wasn't sure. It all happened in an instant, and then Mr. Choate continued his Cheerful Charlie routine.

"Mr. Gilbreath has bought the old Peacock place."

"Really?" she said, tearing her eyes from Twilla. "I didn't know it was for sale."

Mr. Gilbreath chuckled. "Not the entire farm, of course. I'm no farmer. Only the house and grounds. Such a charming old place. The owner lives in Wichita and had no use for them."

"I would think the house is pretty run-down," Miss Mahan said, glancing at Twilla still radiating at the world. "No one's lived in it since Wash and Grace Elizabeth died ten years ago."

"It is a little," Mrs. Gilbreath said pleasantly.

"But structurally sound," interjected Mr. Gilbreath pleasantly.

"We'll enjoy fixing it up," Mrs. Gilbreath continued pleasantly.

"Miss Mahan teaches English to the four upper grades," said Mr. Choate, bringing them back to the subject, "as well as speech and drama. Miss Mahan has been with the Hawley school system for thirty-one years."

The Gilbreaths smiled pleasantly. "My ... ah ... Twilla seems very young to be in the ninth grade." That get-up makes her look about eleven, Miss Mahan thought.

The Gilbreaths beamed at their daughter. "Twilla is only thirteen," Mrs. Gilbreath crooned, pride swelling her like yeast. "She's such an intelligent child. She was able to skip the second grade."

"I see. From where have you moved?"

"Boston," replied Mr. Gilbreath.

"Boston. I hope ... ah ... Twilla doesn't find it difficult to adjust to a small-town school. I'm sure Hawley, Kansas, is quite unlike Boston."

Mr. Gilbreath touched Twilla lovingly on the shoulder. "I'm sure she'll have no trouble."

"Well," Mr. Choate rubbed his palms together. "Twilla is in good hands. Shall I show you around the rest of the school?"

"Of course," smiled Mrs. Gilbreath.

They departed with fond

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murmurings and good-bys, leaving Twilla like a buttercup stranded in a cabbage patch. Miss Mahan mentally shook her head. She hadn't seen a family like that since Dick and Jane and Spot and Puff were sent the way of *McGuffey's Reader.* Mr. and Mrs. Gilbreath were in their middle thirties, good-looking without being glamorous, their clothes nice though as oddly wrong as Twilla's. They seemed cut with some out-dated Ideal Family template. Surely, there must be an older brother, a dog, and a cat somewhere.

"Well ... ah, Twilla," Miss Mahan said, trying to reinforce the normal routine, "if you will take a seat — that one there, behind Alice May Turner. Alice May, will you wave a flag or something so Twilla will know which one?" Alice May giggled. "Thank you, dear." Twilla moved gracefully toward the empty desk. Miss Mahan felt as if she should say something to the child. "I hope you will ... ah ... enjoy going to school in Hawley, dear."

Twilla sat primly and glowed at her. "I'm sure I shall, Miss Mahan," she said, speaking for the first time. Her voice was like the tinkle of fairy bells — just as Miss Mahan was afraid it would be.

"Good," she said and went back to the subject of a get-well card for Sammy Stocker. She had done this so often — there had been a great many sick children in thirty-one years — it had become almost a ritual needing only a small portion of her attention. The rest she devoted to the covert observation of Twilla Gilbreath.

Twilla sat at her desk, displaying excellent posture, with her hands folded neatly before her, seemingly paying attention to the Great Greeting Card Debate, but actually giving the rest of the class careful scrutiny. Miss Mahan marveled at the surreptitious calculation in the girl's face. She realizes she's something of a green moneky, Miss Mahan thought, and I'll bet my pension she doesn't let the situation stand.

And the class surveyed Twilla, in their superior position of established territorial rights, with open curiosity — and with the posture of so many sacks of corn meal. Some of them looked at her, Miss Mahan was afraid, with rude amusement — especially the girls, and especially Wanda O'Dell, who had bloomed suddenly last summer like a plump rose. Oh, yes, Wanda was going to be a problem. Just like her five older sisters. Thank goodness, she sighed, Wanda was the last of them.

Children, Miss Mahan sighed again, but fondly.

Children?

They were children when she started teaching and certainly were

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when *she* was fifteen, but, now, she wasn't sure. Fifteen is such an awkward, indefinite age. Take Ronnie Dwyer: he looks like a prepubescent thirteen at most. And Carter Redwine, actually a couple of months younger than Ronnie, could pass for seventeen easily and was anything but prepubescent. Poor Carter, a child in a man's body. To make matters worse, he was the best-looking boy in town; and to make matters even worse yet, he was well aware of it.

And, she noticed, so was Twilla. Forget it, Little Pink Princess. Carter already has more than he can handle, Miss Mahan chuckled to herself. Can't you see those dark circles under his eyes? They didn't get there from studying. And then she blushed inwardly.

Oh, the poor children. They think they have so many secrets. If they only knew. Between the tattletales and the teachers' gossip she doubted if the whole student body had three secrets between them.

Miss Mahan admonished herself for having such untidy thoughts. She didn't use to think about things like that, but then, fifteen-year-olds didn't lead such overtly sexual lives back then. She remembered reading somewhere that only thirty-five per cent of the children in America were still virgins at fifteen. But those sounded like Big City statistics, not applicable to Hawley.

Then she sighed. It was all beyond her. The bell rang just as the get-well card situation was settled. The children rose reluctantly to go to their first class: algebra with Mr. Whittaker. She noticed that Twilla had cozied up to Alice May, though she still kept her eye on Carter Redwine. Carter was not unaware and with deliberate lordly indifference sauntered from the room with his hand on Wanda O'Dell's shoulder. Miss Mahan thought the glint she observed in Twilla's eyes might lead to an interesting turn of events.

Children.

She cleared her mind of random speculation and geared it to *Macbeth* as the senior class filed in with everything on their minds but Shakespeare. Raynelle Franklin, Mr. Choate's secretary, lurked nervously among them, looking like a chicken who suddenly finds herself with a pack of coyotes. She edged her middle-aged body to Miss Mahan's desk, accepted the absentee report, and scuttled out. Miss Mahan looked forward to Raynelle's performance every morning.

During lunch period, Miss Mahan walked to the dime store for a get-well card which the ninth-grade class would sign that afternoon when they returned for

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English. She glanced at the sky and unconsciously pulled her gray tweed coat tighter about her. The sky had turned a cobalt blue in the north. It wouldn't be long now. Though the temperature must be down to thirty-five already, it seemed colder. She guessed her blood was getting thin; she knew her flesh was. Old age, she thought, old age. Thin blood, thin flesh, and brittle bones. She sometimes felt as if she were turning into a bird.

She almost bumped into Twilla's parents emerging from the dry goods store, their arms loaded with packages. Their pleasant smiles turned on. Click, click. They chatted trivialities for a moment, adding new dimensions to Twilla's already flawless character. Miss Mahan had certainly seen her share of blindly doting parents, but this was unbelievable. She had seen the cold calculation with which Twilla had studied the class, and that was hardly the attribute of an angel. Something didn't jibe somewhere. She spculated on the contents of the packages, but thought she knew. Then she couldn't resist; she asked if Twilla were an only child. She was. Well, there went that.

She looked at the clock on the tower of the courthouse and, subtracting fourteen minutes, decided she'd better hurry if she wanted to eat lunch and have a rest before her one o'clock class.

The teachers' lounge was a reasonably comfortable room where students were forbidden to enter on pain of death — though it seemed to be a continuing game on their part to try. Miss Mahan hung her coat on a hanger and shivered. "Has anyone heard a weather forecast?" she asked the room in general.

Mrs. Latham (home economics) looked up from her needlepoint and shook her head vaguely. Poor old dear, thought Miss Mahan. Due to retire this year, I think. Seems like she's been here since Creation. She taught me when I was in school. Leo Whittaker (math) was reading a copy of *Playboy*. Probably took it from one of the children. "Supposed to be below twenty by five," he said, then grinned and held up the magazine. "Ronnie Dwyer."

Miss Mahan raised her eyebrows. Loretta McBride (history/civics) tsked, shook her head, and went back to her book. Miss Mahan retrieved her carton of orange juice from the small refrigerator and drank it with her fried egg sandwich. She put part of the sandwich back in the Baggie. She hardly had any appetite at all anymore. Guess what they say is true: the older you get ...

She began to crochet on her interminable afghan. The little squares were swiftly becoming a

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pain in the neck, and she regretted ever starting it. She looked at Mrs. Latham and her needlepoint. She sighed, I guess it's expected of us old ladies. Anyway, it gave her something to hide behind when she didn't feel like joining the conversation. But today she felt like talking, though it didn't seem as if anyone else did.

She finished a square and snipped the yarn. "What do you think of the Shirley Temple doll who joined our merry group this morning?"

Mrs. Latham looked up and smiled. "Charming child."

"Yes," said Loretta, putting away the book, "absolutely charming. And smart as a whip. Really knows her American History. Joined in the discussion as if she'd been in the class all semester." Miss McBride was one of the few outsiders teaching in Hawley who gave every indication of remaining. Usually they came and went as soon as greener pastures opened up. Most were like Miss Mahan, Mrs. Latham, and Leo Whittaker, living their entire lives there.

It was practically incestuous, she thought. Mrs. Latham had taught her, she had taught Leo, and he was undoubtedly teaching part of the next group. Miss Mahan had to admit that Leo had been something of a surprise. He was only twenty-five and had given no indication in high school that he was destined for anything better than a hanging. She wondered how long it would be before Leo connected his students inability to keep secrets from the teachers with his own disreputable youth.

Now here he was. Two years in the army, four years in college, his second year of teaching, married to Lana Redwine (Carter's cousin and one of the nicest girls in town) with a baby due in a couple of months. You never can tell. You just never can tell.

"Well, Leo," Miss Mahan asked bemused, "what did you think of Twilla Gilbreath?"

"Oh, I don't know. She seems very intelligent — at least in algebra. Quiet and well-behaved — unlike a few others. Dresses kinda funny. Seems to have set her sights on my cousin-in-law." He grinned. "Fat chance!" Miss Mahan wouldn't say Leo was handsome — not in the way Carter Redwine was — but that grin was the reason half the girls in school had a crush on him.

"Oh? You noticed that too? I imagine she may have a few surprises up her sleeve. I don't think our Twilla is the fairy tale princess she's made out to be." She began another square.

"You must be mistaken, Miss Mahan," Loretta said wide-eyed. "The child is an absolute darling.

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And the very idea: a baby like that running after Carter Redwine. I never heard of such a thing!"

"Really?" Miss Mahan smiled to herself and completed a shell stitch. "We shall see what we shall see."

The norther hit during the ninth-grade English class, bringing a merciful, if only temporary, halt to the sufferings of Silas Marner. The glass in the windows rattled and pinged. The wind played on the downspouts like a mad flautist. Sand ticked against the windows, and the guard lights came on in the school yard. Outside had become a murky indigo, as if the world were under water. Miss Mahan switched on the lights, making the windows seems even darker. Garbage cans rolled down the street, but you could hardly hear them above the howl of the wind. And the downtown Christmas decorations were whipping loose, as they always did at least once every year.

The sand was only temporary; a cloud of it blown along before the storm, but the wind could last all night or all week. Miss Mahan remembered when she was a girl during the great drought of the thirties, when the sand wasn't temporary, when it came like a mile-high solid tidal wave of blown-away farmland, when you couldn't tell noon from midnight, when houses were half buried after the wind finally died down. She shuddered.

"All right, children. Settle down. You've all seen northers before."

Leo and Loretta were right about one thing: Twilla was intelligent. She was also perceptive, imaginative ... and adaptable. She had already dropped the Little Mary Sunshine routine, though Miss Mahan couldn't imagine why she had used it in the first place. It must have been a pose — as if the child had somehow confused the present and 1905.

The temperature had dropped to eighteen by the time school was out. The wind hit Miss Mahan like icy needles. Her gray tweed coat did about as much good as tissue paper. She grabbed at her scarf as it threatened to leave her head and almost lost her briefcase. She walked as fast as her aging legs would go and made it to her six-year-old Plymouth. The car started like a top, billowing a cloud of steam from the exhaust pipe to be whipped away by the wind.

She sat for a moment, getting her breath back, letting the car warm up. She saw Twilla, huddled against the wind, dash to a new black Chrysler and get in with her parents. The car backed out and moved away. Miss Mahan wasn't the least surprised that little Miss Gilbreath wasn't riding the school

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bus. The old Peacock place was a mile off the highway at Miller's Corners, a once-upon-a-time town eight miles east of Hawley.

Well, I guess I'm not much better, she thought. I only live four blocks away — but I'll be darned if I'll walk it today. She always did walk except when the weather was bad, and, oddly enough, the older she got, the worse the weather seemed to get.

She pulled into the old carriage house that served equally well with automobiles and walked hurriedly across the yard into the big, rather ancient house that had belonged to her grandfather. She knew it was silly to live all alone in such a great pile — she had shut off the upstairs and hadn't been up in months — but it was equally silly not to live there. It was paid for and her grandfather had set up a trust fund to pay the taxes. It was a very nice house, really; cool in the summer, but (she turned up the fire) a drafty old barn in the winter.

She turned on the television to see if there were any weather bulletins. While it warmed up, she closed off all the downstairs rooms except the kitchen, her bedroom, and the parlor, putting rolled up towels along the bottoms of the doors to keep the cold air out. She returned to the parlor to see the television screen covered with snow and horizontal streaks of lightning.

She knew it. The aerial had blown down again. She turned off the set and put on a kettle for tea.

The wind had laid somewhat by the time Miss Mahan reached school the next morning, but still blew in fitful gusts. The air was the color of ice and so cold she expected to hear it crackle as she moved through it. The windows in her room were steamed over, and she was busily wiping them when Twilla arrived. Although Miss Mahan had expected something like this, she stared nevertheless.

Twilla's hair was still the color of spun elfin gold, but the drop curls were missing. Instead, it fell in soft folds to below her shoulders in a style much too adult for a thirteen-year-old. But, then, this morning Twilla looked as much like thirteen as Mrs. Latham. All the physical things were there: the hair, just the right amount of make-up, a short stylish skirt, a pale-green jersey that displayed her small but adequate breasts, a lovely antique pendant on a gold chain nestling between them.

But it wasn't only the physical things — any thirteen-year-old would have appeared more mature with a similar overhaul — it was something in the face, in her bearing: an attitude of casual sophistication, a confidence usually attainable only by those secure in their power. Twilla smiled. Shirley

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Temple and Mary Pickford were gone; this was the smile of a conqueror.

Miss Mahan realized her face was hanging out, but before she was forced to say anything, several students, after a prelude of clanging locker doors, barged in. Twilla turned to look at them, and the moment was electric. Their inane chatter stopped as if someone had thrown a switch. They gaped. Twilla gave them time for the full effect, then strolled to them and began chatting as if nothing were new.

Miss Mahan sat at her desk feeling a little weak in the knees. She waited for Carter Redwine to arrive as, obviously, was Twilla. When he did, it was almost anticlimactic. His recently acquired worldliness and sexual sophistication melted away in one callow gawk. But he recovered quickly and his feelers popped up, testing the situation. Twilla moved to her desk, giving him a satisfied smile. Wanda O'Dell looked as if she'd eaten a bug.

Miss Mahan had to admit to the obvious. Twilla was a stunning beauty. But the whole thing was ... curious ... to say the least.

The conservation in the teachers' lounge was devoted almost exclusively to the transformation of Twilla Gilbreath. Mrs. Latham had noted it vaguely. Loretta McBride ceded reluctantly to Miss Mahan's observations of the previous day. Leo Whittaker expressed a masculine appreciation of the new Twilla, earning a fishy look from Loretta. "I never saw Carter act so goofy," he said grinning.

But neither they nor any of the others noted the obvious strangeness of it all. At least, Miss Mahan thought, it seems obvious to me.

That day Miss Mahan set out on a campaign of Twilla watching. She even went upstairs to her grandfather's study and purloined one of the blank journals from the bottom drawer of his desk. She curled up in the big chair, after building a fire in the parlor fireplace — the first one this year — and opened the journal to the first page ruled with pale-blue lines. She wrote *Twilla,* after rejecting *The Twilla Gilbreath Affair, The Peculiar Case of Twilla Gilbreath,* and others in a similar vein.

She felt silly and conspiratorial and almost put the journal away, but, instead, wrote further down the page: *Is my life so empty that I must fill it by spying on a student?*

She thought about what she had written and decided it was either unfair to Twilla or unfair to herself, but let it remain. She turned to the second page and wrote *Tuesday, the 5th* at the top. She filled that page and the next with her impressions of Twilla's first day.

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She headed the fourth page *Wednesday, the 6th* and noted the events of the day just ending.

On rereading, she thought perhaps she might have over emphasized the oddities, the incongruities, and the anachronisms; but, after all, that was what it was about, wasn't it?

It began snowing during the night. Miss Mahan drove to school through a fantasy landscape. The wind was still blowing, and the steely flakes came down almost horizontally. She loved snow, always had, but she preferred the Christmas card variety when the big fluffy flakes floated down through still, crisp air like so many pillow fights.

She knew there had been developments as soon as Carter Redwine entered the room. His handsome face was glum and sullen and looked as if he hadn't slept. He sat at his desk with his head hunched between his shoulders and didn't look up until Twilla came in. Miss Mahan darted her eyes from one to the other. Carter looked away again, his neck and ears glowing red. Twilla ignored him; more than that — she consigned him to total nonexistence.

Miss Mahan was dumfounded. What on earth ...? Had Carter made advances and been rebuffed? That wouldn't explain it. Surely he had been turned down before. Hadn't he? Of course, she knew he had. Leo, who viewed his cousin-in-law's adventures with bemused affection, had been laughing about it in the teachers' lounge one day. "He'll settle down," Leo had said, "he just has a new toy." Which made her blush after she'd thought about it a while.

Surely, he hadn't tried to take Twilla ... by force? She couldn't believe that. Despite everything, Carter was a very decent boy. He had just developed too early, was too handsome, and knew too many willing girls. What then? Was it the first pangs of love? That look on his face wasn't lovesickness. It was red, roaring mortification. Then she knew what must have happened. Carter had not been rebuffed, maybe even encouraged. But, whatever she had expected, he had been inadequate.

Twilla had made another error. She had failed to realize that Carter, despite the way he looked, was only fifteen. Then the ugly enormity of it struck her. My God, she thought, Twilla is only thirteen. What had she wanted from Carter that he was too inexperienced or naive to give her?

Friday, the 8th

Billy Jermyn came in this morning with a black eye. It's all over school that Carter gave it to him in gym yesterday when Billy teased him about Twilla. What did

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she do to humiliate him so? I've never known Carter to fight. I guess that's one secret that'll never pentrate the teachers' lounge.

Twilla is taking over the class. I've seen it coming since Wednesday. It's subtle but pretty obvious when you know what to look for. The others defer to her in lots of little ways. Twilla is being very gracious about it. Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. (*Wonder where that little saying came from? — doesn't make sense when you analyze it.*)

I also wonder who Twilla's got her amorous sights on, now that Carter failed to make the grade. She hasn't shown an interest in anyone in particular that I've noticed. And there's been no gossip in the lounge. The flap created by Carter has probably shown her the wisdom of keeping her romances to herself. She's adaptable.

Sonny Bowen offered to put my TV aerial back up for me. I knew one of them would. Bless their conniving little hearts.

TGIF!

Miss Mahan closed the journal and sat watching a log in the fireplace that was about to fall. The whole Twilla affair was curious, but no more curious than her own attitude. She should have been scandalized (you didn't see too many thirteen-year-old combinations of Madame Bovary and the Dragon Lady — even these days), but she only felt fascination. Somehow it didn't seem quite real; more as if she were watching a movie. She smiled slightly. Wonder if it would be rated R or X, she thought. R, I guess. Haven't seen anyone with their clothes off yet.

The log fell, making her jump. She laughed in embarrassment, banked the fire, and went to bed.

The snow was still falling Monday morning, though the fierceness of the storm had passed. There was little wind, and the temperature had risen somewhat. That's more like it, Miss Mahan said to herself, watching the big soft flakes float down in random zigzags.

The bell rang, and she turned away from the windows to watch the ninth-grade homeroom clatter out. The Gilbreaths must have been out of town over the weekend, she observed. Twilla didn't get that outfit in Hawley. But she was still wearing that lovely, rather barbaric pendant around her neck. She sighed. Two days away from Twilla had made her wonder if she weren't getting senile; if she weren't making a mystery out of a molehill; if she weren't imagining the whole thing. Twilla was certainly a picture of normalcy this morning.

Raynelle Franklin came for the absentee report looking more like a frightened chicken than ever. She

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followed an evasive course to Miss Mahan's desk and took the report as if she were afraid of being struck. There were only two names on the report: Sammy Stocker and Yvonne Wilkins.

Raynelle glanced at the names and paled. "Haven't you *heard?*" she whispered.

"Heard what?"

Raynelle looked warily at the senior class shuffling in and backed away, motioning for Miss Mahan to follow. Miss Mahan groaned and followed her into the hall. Students were milling about everywhere, chattering and banging locker doors. Raynelle grimaced in distress.

"Raynelle, will you stand still and tell me!" Miss Mahan commanded in exasperation.

"Someone will hear," she pleaded.

"Hear *what?*"

Raynelle fluttered her hands and blew air through her teeth. She looked quickly around and then huddled against Miss Mahan. "Yvonne Wilkins," she hissed.

"Well?"

"She's ... she'd ...*dead!*"

Miss Mahan thought Raynelle was about to faint. She grabbed her arm. "How?" she asked in her no-nonsense voice.

"I don't know," Raynelle gasped. "No one will tell me."

Miss Mahan thought for a moment. "Go on with what you were doing." She released Raynelle and marched into Mr. Choate's office.

Mr. Choate looked up with a start. He was already wearing his three o'clock face. "I see you've heard." He was resigned.

"Yes. What is going on? Raynelle was having a conniption fit." Miss Mahan looked at him over her glasses the same way she would a recalcitrant student.

"Miss Mahan," he sighed, "Sheriff Walker thought it best if the whole thing were kept quiet."

"Quiet? Why?"

"He didn't want a panic."

"Panic? What did she die of, bubonic plague?"

"No." He looked at her as if he wished she would vanish. "I guess I might as well tell you. It'll be all over town by ten o'clock anyway. Yvonne was murdered." He said the last word as if he'd never heard it before.

Miss Mahan felt her knees giving way and quickly sat down. "This is unbelievable," she said weakly. Mr. Choate nodded. "Why does Robin Walker want to keep it quiet? What happened?"

"Miss Mahan, I've told you all I can tell you."

"Surely Robin knows secrecy will only make it worse? Making a mystery out of it is guaranteed to create a panic."

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Mr. Choate shrugged. "I have my instructions. You're late for your class."

Miss Mahan went back to her room in a daze, her imagination ringing up possibilities like a cash register. She couldn't keep her mind on *Macbeth* and the class was restless. They obviously didn't know yet, but their radar had picked up something they couldn't explain.

When the class was over, she went into the hall and saw the news moving through like a shock wave. She accomplished absolutely nothing the rest of the morning. The children were fidgety and kept whispering among themselves. She was as disturbed as they and made only half-hearted attempts to restore order.

At lunch time she bundled up and trounced through the snow to the courthouse. It was too hot inside, and the heat only accentuated the courthouse smell. She didn't know what it was, but they all smelled the same. Maybe it was the state-issue disinfectant. The Hawley courthouse hadn't changed since she could remember. The same wooden benches lined the hall; the same ceiling fans encircled the round lights. No, she corrected herself, there was a change: the brass spittoons had been removed some twelve years ago. It seemed subtly wrong without the spittoons.

She was removing her coat when Rose Newcastle emerged in a huff from the sheriff's office, her heels popping on the marble floor, sending echoes ringing down the hall. Rose was the last of the three Willet girls, the daughters of old Judge Willet. People still called them the Willet girls, although Rose was considerably older than Miss Mahan. She was a widow now, her husband having finally died of insignificance.

"Hello, Rose," she said, feeling trapped. Rose puffed to a halt like a plump locomotive.

"Oh, Miss Mahan, isn't it *awful!*" she wailed. "And Robin Walker absolutely refuses to do anything! We could all be murdered in our beds!"

"I'm sure he's doing everything he can, Rose. What did he tell you?"

"Nothing! Absolutely nothing! If my father were still alive, I'd have that man's job. I told him he'd better watch his step come next election. I told him, as a civic leader in this town, I had a right to know what's going on. I told him I had a good mind to organize a citizens' committee to investigate the whole affair."

"Give him a chance. Robin is a very conscientious man."

"He's a child."

"Come on, Rose. He's at least thirty. I taught him for four years,

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and I have complete confidence in him. You'll have to excuse me. I'm here to see him myself."

"He won't tell you anything," Rose said, sounding slightly mollified.

"Perhaps," Miss Mahan said. Rose echoed off down the hall. "He might have if you haven't put his tail over the dashboard," she muttered and pushed open the door.

Loreen Whittaker, Leo's aunt by marriage, looked up and smiled. "Hello, Miss Mahan. What can I do for you?"

"Hello, Loreen. I'd like to see Robin, if I may."

Loreen chuckled. "He gave me strict orders to let no one in but the governor — right after Mrs. Newcastle left."

Miss Mahan grimaced. "I met her in the hall. Would you ask him? It's important."

Loreen arose from her desk and went into the sheriff's private office. Miss Mahan felt that she and Robin were good friends. She had not only taught him, but his sister, Mary Ellen; and his little brother, Curtis, was a senior this year. She liked all of them and thought they liked her. Robin's son was in the second grade and was a little doll. She was looking forward to teaching him, too.

Loreen came out of his office, grinning. "He said you could come in but I was to frisk you first." Her smile wavered. "Try to cheer him up, Miss Mahan. It's the first ... murder we've had since he's been in office, and it's getting to him."

Miss Mahan nodded and went in. The sheriff sat hunched over his desk. His hair was mussed where he had been running his hand through it. There was a harried look on his face, but he dredged up a thin smile for her.

"You aren't gonna give me trouble, too, are you?" he asked warily.

"I ran into Rose in the hall," she smiled back at him.

He motioned her to a chair. "What's the penalty for punching a civic leader in the nose?"

"You should know that better than I."

He grunted. "Yeah." He leaned back in the chair and stretched his long legs. "I can't discuss Yvonne Wilkins, if that's what you're here for."

"That's why I'm here. Don't you think this secrecy is worse than the facts? People will be imagining all sorts of horrible things."

"I doubt if anything they could imagine would be worse than the actual facts, Miss Mahan. You'll have to trust me. I have to do it this way." He ran his fingers through his hair again. "I'm afraid I may be in over my head on this. There's just me and five deputies for the

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whole county. And we haven't anything to work on. Nothing."

"Where did they find her?"

"Okay," he sighed. "I'll tell you this much. Yvonne went out yesterday afternoon in her father's car to visit Linda Murray. When she didn't come home last night, Mr. Wilkins called the Murrays and they said Yvonne left about six thirty. He was afraid she'd had an accident in the snow; so he called me. We found her about three this morning out on the dirt road nearly to the old Weatherly place. She was in the car ... dead. It's been snowing for five days. There wasn't a track of any kind and no fingerprints that didn't belong. And that's all you're gonna worm out of me."

Miss Mahan had an idea. "Had she been molested?"

Robin looked at her as if he'd been betrayed. "Yes," he said simply.

"But," she protested, "why the big mystery? I know it's horrible, but it's not likely to cause a ... a panic."

He got up and paced around the office. "Miss Mahan, I can't tell you any more."

"Is there more? Is there more than rape and murder?" She felt something like panic rising in her.

Robin squatted in front of her, taking her hands in his. "If there's anyone in town I'd tell, it would be you. You know that. I've loved you ever since I was fourteen years old. If you keep after me, I'll tell you. So have a little pity on a friend and stop pushing."

She felt her eyes burning and motioned for him to get up. "Robin, you're not playing fair." She stood up and he held her coat for her. "You always were able to get around me. Okay, you win."

"Thank you, Miss Mahan," he said genuinely relieved and kissed her on the forehead. She stopped in the hall and dabbed at her eyes.

But I haven't given up yet, she thought as she huddled in her coat on the way to Paul Sullivan's office. The bell tinkled on the door, and the nurse materialized from somewhere.

"Miss Mahan. What are you doing out in this weather?"

"I'd like to see the doctor, Elaine." She hung her coat on the rack.

"He's with the little Archer girl now. She slipped on the snow and twisted her ankle."

"I'll wait." She sat and picked up a magazine without looking at it. Elaine Holliday had been one of her students. Who in town hadn't? she wondered. Elaine wanted to talk about the murder, as did Louise Archer when she emerged with her limping daughter, but Miss Mahan wasn't in the mood for gossip and speculation. She

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marched into Dr. Sullivan's sanctum.

"Hello, Paul," she said before he could open his mouth. "I've just been to see Robin. He told me Yvonne had been raped, but he wouldn't tell me what the big mystery is. I know you're what passes for the County Medical Examiner; so you know as much as he does. I've known you for fifty years and even thought at one time you might propose to me, but you didn't. So don't give me any kind of runaround. Tell me what happened to Yvonne." She plopped into a chair and glared at him.

He shook his head in dismay. "I thought I might propose to you at one time too, but right now is a good example of why I didn't. You were so independent and bull-headed, you scared me to death."

"Don't change the subject."

"You won't like it."

"I don't expect to."

"There's no way I can 'put it delicately,' as they say."

"You don't know high-school kids. I doubt if you *know* anything indelicate that I haven't heard from them."

"Even if I tell you everything I know about it, it'll still be a mystery. It is to me."

"Quit stalling."

"Okay, you asked for it. And if you repeat this to anyone, I'll wring your scrawny old neck."

"I won't."

"All right. Yvonne was ... how can I say it? ... she was sexually mutilated. She was split open. Not cut — torn, ripped. As if someone had forced a two-by-four into her — probably something larger than that."

"Had they?" Miss Mahan felt her throat beginning to burn from the bile rising in it.

"No. At least there was no evidence of it. No splinters, no soil, no foreign matter of any kind."

"My Lord," she moaned. "How she must have suffered."

"Yes," he said softly, "but only for a few seconds. She must have lost consciousness almost immediately. And she was dead long before they finished with her."

"They? What makes you think there was more than one?"

"Are you sure you want to hear the rest of it?"

"Yes," she said, but she didn't.

"I said we found no foreign matter, but we found semen."

"Wasn't that to be expected?"

"Yes, I suppose. But not in such an amount."

"What do you mean?"

"We found nearly a hundred and fifty cc's. There was probably even more. A lot of it had drained out onto the car seat." His voice was dull.

She shook her head, confused. "A hundred and fifty cc's?"

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"About a cup full."

She felt nauseous. "How much ... how much ...?"

The average male produces about two or three cc's. Maybe four."

"Does that mean she was ... what? ... fifty times?"

"And fifty different men."

"That's impossible."

"Yes. I know. One of the deputies took it to Wichita to be analyzed. To see if it's human."

"Human?"

"Yes. We thought someone might..."

She held up her hand. "You don't need to go ... go any further." They sat for a while, not saying anything.

After a bit he said, "You can see why Robin wanted to keep it quiet?"

"Yes." She shivered, wishing she had her coat even though the office was warm. "Is there any more?"

He shook his head and slumped morosely deep in the chair. "No. Only that Robin is pretty sure she was ... killed somewhere else and then taken out on the old road because there was almost no blood in or around the car. How they ever drove so far out on that road in the snow is another mystery, although a minor one. The deputy was about to give up and turn around, and he had on snow chains."

Miss Mahan was late for her one o'clock class. The children hadn't become unruly as they usually did, but were subdued and talking in hushed voices. A discussion of *Silas Marner* proved futile; so she told them to sit quietly and read. She didn't feel any more like classwork than they did. She noticed that Twilla's eyes were bright with suppressed excitement. Well, she thought, I guess you can't expect her to react like the others. She hardly knew Yvonne.

It had stopped snowing by the time Mr. Choate circulated a memo that school would be closed Wednesday for the funeral. Apparently Robin had managed to keep a lid on knowledge of the rape. There was speculation on the subject, but she could tell it was only speculation.

When she got home, she saw the Twilla journal lying beside the big chair in front of the cold fireplace. Strange, Twilla had hardly crossed her mind all day. She guessed it only proved how silly and stupid her Twilla watching really was. She put the journal away in the library table drawer and decided that was enough of that nonsense.

Tuesday, the 12th

This morning I saw Twilla jab Alice May Turner in the thigh with a large darning needle.

Miss Mahan stopped in the middle of a sentence and stared in

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disbelief. She walked slowly to Twilla's desk, feeling every eye in the class following her. "What's going on here?" she asked in a deathly quiet voice. Twilla looked up at her with such total incomprehension that she wondered if she had imagined the whole thing. But she looked at Alice May and saw her mouth tight and trembling and the tears being held in her eyes only by surface tension.

"What do you mean, Miss Mahan?" Twilla asked in a bewildered voice.

"Why did you stick Alice May with a needle?"

"Miss Mahan! I didn't!"

"I saw you."

"But I didn't!" Twilla's eyes were becoming damp as if she were about to cry in injured innocence.

"Don't bother to cry," Miss Mahan said calmly. "I'm not impressed." Twilla's mouth tightened for the briefest instant. Miss Mahan turned to Alice May. "Did she jab you with a needle?"

Alice May blinked and a tear rolled down each cheek. "No, ma'am," she answered in a strained voice.

"Then why are you crying?" Miss Mahan demanded.

"I'm not crying," Alice May insisted, wiping her face.

"I think both of you had better come with me to Mr. Choate."

Mr. Choate wouldn't or, I guess, couldn't do anything. They both lied their heads off, insisting that nothing happened. Twilla even had the gall to accuse me of spying on her and persecuting her. I think Mr. Choate believed me. He could hardly help it when Alice May began rubbing her thigh in the midst of her denials.

Miss Mahan sent Twilla back to the room and kept Alice May in the hall. Alice May began to snuffle and wouldn't look at her. "Alice May, dear," she said patiently. "I saw what Twilla did. Why are you fibbing to me?"

"I'm not!" she wailed softly.

"Alice May, I don't want any more of this nonsense!" Why on earth did Twilla do it? she wondered. Alice May was such a silly harmless girl. Why would anyone want to hurt her?

"Miss Mahan, I can't tell you," she sobbed.

"Here." Miss Mahan gave her a handkerchief. Alice May took it and rubbed at her red eyes. "Why can't you tell me? What's going on between you and Twilla?"

"Nothing," she sniffed.

"Alice May. I promise to drop the whole subject if you'll just tell me the truth."

Alice May finally looked at her. "Will you?"

"Yes," she groaned in exasperation.

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"Well, my ... my giggling gets on her nerves."

"What?"

"She told me if I didn't stop, I'd be sorry."

"Why didn't you pick up something and brain her with it?"

Alice May's eyes widened in disbelief. "Miss Mahan, I couldn't do that!"

"She didn't mind hurting you, did she?"

"I'm ... I'm afraid of her. Everybody is."

"Why? What has she done?"

"I don't know. Nothing. I'm just afraid. You promise not to let her know I told you?"

"I promise. Now, go to the restroom and wash your face."

Twilla kept watching me the rest of the period. I imagine she suspects Alice May spilled the beans. The other children were very quiet and expectant as if they thought Twilla and I would go at each other tooth and claw. I wonder whom they would root for if we did.

I'll have to admit to a great deal of perverse pleasure in tarnishing Twilla's reputation in the teachers' lounge. I was a little surprised to find a few of the others had become somewhat disenchanted with her also. They didn't have such a concrete example of viciousness as I had, but she was making them uncomfortable.

I also discovered who Twilla's romantic (if you can call it that) interest is since Carter flunked out.

Leo Whittaker!

I was never so shocked and disappointed in my life. An affair between a teacher and a student is bad enough but — Leo! No wonder she was being quiet about it. I thought he acted a bit peculiar when we discussed Twilla. So I said bold as brass: "I wonder whom she's sleeping with?" He turned red and left the room, looking guilty as sin.

I don't know what to do about it. I've got to do something. But what? what? what? I can't do anything to hurt Leo, because it'll also hurt poor Lana.

How could Leo be so stupid?

Dark clouds hung oppressively low the morning of the funeral. They scudded across the sky so rapidly that Miss Mahan got dizzy looking at them. She stood with the large group huddled against the cold outside the First Christian Church of Hawley, waiting for the formation of the procession to the County Line Cemetery. The services had drawn a capacity crowd, mostly from curiosity, she was afraid. The entire ninth grade was there, with the exception of Sammy Stocker, of course, and Twilla. Only two teachers were missing: Mrs. Bryson (first grade), who had the flu, and Leo Whittaker. Leo's absence was peculiar because Lana was there,

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looking pale and beautifully pregnant. She was with Carter Redwine and his parents. Carter seems to be recovering nicely from his little misadventure, she thought.

She spotted Paul Sullivan and crunched through the snow to his side. He saw her coming and frowned. "Hello, Paul. Did you get the report from Wichita?"

"Do you think this is the place to discuss it?"

"Why not? No one will overhear. Did you?"

He sighed. "Yes."

"Well?"

"It was human — although there were certain peculiarities."

"What peculiarities?"

He cocked his eyes at her. "If I told you, would it mean anything?"

She shrugged. "What else?"

"Well, it all came from the same person — as far as they could tell. At least, there was nothing to indicate that it didn't. Also, all the sperm was the same age."

"What does that mean?"

"The thought occurred to us that someone might be trying to create a grisly hoax. That someone might have ... well ... saved it up until they had that much."

"I get the picture," she grimaced. She thought a moment. "Can't they ... ah ... freeze it? Haven't I read something about that?"

"You can't do it in your Frigidaire. If the person who did it had the knowledge and the laboratory equipment to do that ... well ... it's as improbable as the other theories."

"Robin hasn't learned anything yet?"

"I don't know. Some of us aren't as nosy as others."

She smiled at him as she spotted Lana Whittaker moving toward the Redwine car. She began edging away. "Will you keep me posted?"

"No."

"Thank you, Paul." She caught up with Lana. "Hello, dear."

Lana started and turned, then smiled thinly. "Hello, Miss Mahan."

She exchanged greetings with Mr. and Mrs. Redwine and Carter as they entered their car. "Should you be out in this weather, Lana?"

Lana shrugged. She looked a little haggard and her eyes were puffy. "I'll be all right."

Miss Mahan took her arm. "Come on. My car is right here. Get in out of the cold and talk to me. We'll have plenty of time before they get this mess untangled." Lana went unprotesting and sat in the car staring straight ahead. Miss Mahan started the car and switched on the heater although it was still fairly warm. She turned and looked at Lana.

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"When you were in school," she said quietly, "you came to me with all your problems. It made me feel a little like I had a daughter of my own."

Lana turned and looked at her with love and pain in her eyes. "I'm not a little girl any more, Miss Mahan. I'm a married lady with a baby on the way. I should be able to solve my own problems."

"Where's Leo?"

Lana leaned back against the seat and put her fingers on the sides of her nose. "I don't know," she said simply, as if her tears had been used up. "He went out last night and I haven't seen him since. I told my aunt and uncle he went to Liberal to buy some things for the baby."

"Did you call Robin? Maybe he had an accident."

"No. There was no accident. I thought so the first time."

"When was that?"

"Last Friday night. He didn't come in until after midnight. The same thing Saturday. He didn't show up until dawn Monday and Tuesday. This time he didn't come back at all."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing. He wouldn't say anything. Miss Mahan, I know he still loves me; I can tell. He seems genuinely sorry and ashamed of what he's doing, but he keeps ... keeps doing it. I've tried to think who she might be, but I can't imagine anyone. He's so tired and worn out when he comes home, it would be funny if it ... if it were happening to someone else."

"Do you still love him?"

Lana smiled. "Oh, yes," she said softly. "More than anything. I love him so much it ..." she blushed, "... it gives me goose-bumps. I was crazy about Leo even when we were in high school, but he was so wild he scared me to death. I thought ... I thought he had changed."

"I think he has." Miss Mahan took Lana's hand as she saw Robin get in his car and pull out with the pallbearers and the hearse directly behind him. "They're starting. You'd better go back to your car. I'm glad you told me. I'll do all I can to help."

Lana opened the car door. "I appreciate it, Miss Mahan, but I really don't see what you can do."

"We shall see what we shall see."

Miss Mahan managed to hang back until she was last in the funeral procession. The highway had been cleared of snow, and she hoped it wouldn't start again before they all got back to town. She turned off the highway at Miller's Corners, down the dirt road to the old Peacock place. There was nothing left of Miller's Corners now except a few scattered farmhouses.

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The cafe had been moved into Hawley eight years ago, and the Gulf station had been closed when George Cuttsanger died last fall. The Gulf people had even taken down the signs.

If the Gilbreaths were fixing up the old Peacock farm, they must have started on the inside. It was still as gray and weary-looking as it was ten years ago, if not more so. The black Chrysler was in the old carriage house, and smoke drifted this way and that from one of the chimneys.

She parked and sat looking at the house a moment before getting out. The snow was clean and undisturbed on the front walk. She guessed they must use the back door; it was closer to the carriage house.

No one answered her knock, but she knew they were home. She waited and knocked again. Still no response. She took a deep breath and pushed open the door. "Mrs. Gilbreath?" she called. She listened carefully but there was not a sound. She could hear the melting snow dripping from the eaves and the little ticking sounds an old house makes. She went in and closed the door behind her. "Mrs. Gilbreath?" she called again, hearing nothing but a faint echo. The house was warm but even more dilapidated than the last time she was in it.

She stepped into the parlor and saw them both sitting there. "Oh!" she gasped, startled, and then laughed in embarrassment. "I didn't mean to barge in, but no one answered my knock." Mr. and Mrs. Gilbreath sat in high-back easy chairs facing away from her. She could only see the tops of their heads. They didn't move.

"Mrs. Gilbreath?" she said, beginning to feel queasy. She walked slowly around them, her eyes fixed so intently on the chairs that she momentarily experienced an optical illusion that the chairs were turning slowly to face her. She blinked and took an involuntary step backward. They sat in the chairs dressed to go out, their eyes focused on nothing. Neither of them moved, not even the slight movements of breathing, nor did their eyes blink. She stared at them in astonishment, fearing they were dead.

Miss Mahan approached them cautiously and touched Mrs. Gilbreath on the arm. The flesh was warm and soft. She quickly drew her hand back with a gasp. Then she reached again and shook the woman's shoulder. "Mrs. Gilbreath," she whispered.

"She won't answer you." Miss Mahan gave a little shriek and looked up with a jerk. Twilla was strolling down the stairs, tying the sash on a rather barbaric-looking

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floor-length fur robe. The antique pendant she always wore was around her neck. She stopped at the foot of the stairs and leaned against the newel post. She smiled. "They're only simulacra, you know."

"What?" Miss Mahan was bewildered. She hadn't expected Twilla to be here. She thought she would be with Leo.

Twilla indicated her parents. "Watch." Miss Mahan jerked her head back toward the people in the chairs. Suddenly, their heads twisted on their necks until the blank faces looked at each other. Then they grimaced and stuck out their tongues. The faces became expressionless again, and the heads swiveled back to stare at nothing.

Twilla's laugh trilled through the house. Miss Mahan jerked her eyes back to the beautiful child, feeling like a puppet herself. "They're rather clever, don't you think?" she cooed as she walked toward Miss Mahan, the fur robe making a soft sound against the floor. "I'm glad you came, Miss Mahan. It saves me the trouble of going to you."

"What?" Miss Mahan felt out of control. Her heart was beating like a hammer, and she clutched the back of Mrs. Gilbreath's chair to keep from falling.

Twilla smiled at her panic. "I haven't been unaware of your interest in me, you know. I had decided it was time to get you out of the way before you became a problem."

"Get me out of the way?"

"Of course."

"What are you?" She felt her voice rising to a screech but she couldn't stop it: "What are these things pretending to be your parents?"

Twilla laughed. "A thirteen-year-old is quite limited in this society. I had to have parents to do the things I couldn't do myself." She shrugged. "There are other ways, but this is the least bothersome."

"I won't let you get me out of the way," Miss Mahan hissed, dismissing the things she didn't understand and concentrating on that single threat, trying to pull her reeling senses together.

"Don't be difficult, Miss Mahan. There's nothing you can do to stop me." Twilla's face had become petulant, and then she smiled slyly. "Come with me. I want to show you something." Miss Mahan didn't budge. Twilla took a few steps and then turned back. "Come along, now. Don't you want all your questions answered?"

She started up the stairs. Miss Mahan followed her. Her legs felt mechanical. Halfway up she turned and looked back at the two figures sitting in the chairs like department

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store dummies. Twilla called to her and she continued to the top.

A hallway ran the length of the house upstairs with bedroom doors on either side. Twilla opened one of them and motioned Miss Mahan in. The house wasn't as old as her own, but it still had the fourteen-foot ceilings. But the ceilings, as well as the walls, had been removed. This side of the hall was one big area, opening into the attic, the roof at least twenty feet overhead, with what appeared to be some sort of trap door recently built into it. The area was empty except for a large gray mass hunched in one corner like a partially collapsed tent.

"He's asleep," Twilla said and whistled. The mass stirred. The tent unfolded slowly, rustling like canvas sliding on canvas. Bony ribs spread gracefully, stretching the canvaslike flesh into vast bat wings which lifted out and up to bump against the roof. The wings trembled slightly as they stretched lazily and then settled, folding neatly behind the thing sitting on the floor.

It was a man, or almost a man. He would have been about sixteen feet tall had he been standing. His body was massively muscled and covered with purplish gray scales that shimmered metallically even in the dim light. His chest, shoulders, and back bulged with great wing-controlling muscles. He stretched his arms and yawned, then rubbed at his eyes with horny fists. His head was hairless and scaled; his ears rose to points reaching above the crown of his skull. The face was angelically beautiful, but the large liquid eyes were dull, and the mouth was slack like an idiot's. He scratched his hip with two-inch talons, making the sound of a rasp on metal. He was completely naked and emphatically male. His massive sex lay along his heavy thigh like a great purple-headed snake.

"This is Dazreel," Twilla said pleasantly. The creature perked up at the sound of his name and looked toward them. "He's a djinn," Twilla continued. He turned his empty gaze away and began idly fondling himself. Twilla sighed. "I'm afraid Dazreel's pleasures are rather limited."

Miss Mahan ran.

She clattered down the stairs, clutching frantically at the banister to keep her balance. She lost her left shoe and stumbled on the bottom step, hitting her knees painfully on the floor. She reeled to her feet, unaware of her shins shining through her torn stockings. Twilla's crystal laughter peeling down the stairs hardly penetrated the shimmering white layer of panic blanketing her mind.

She bruised her hands on the

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front door, clawing at it, trying to open it the wrong way. She careened across the porch, into the snow, not feeling the cold on her stockinged left foot. But her lopsided gait caused her to fall, sprawling on her face, burying her arms to the elbows in the snow. She crawled a few feet before gaining enough momentum to regain her feet. Her whole front was frosted with white, but she didn't notice.

She locked the car doors, praying it would start. But she released the clutch too quickly, and it bucked and stalled. She ground the starter and turned her head to see Twilla standing on the porch, her arms hugging a pillar, her cheek caressing it, her smile mocking. The motor caught. Miss Mahan turned the car in a tight circle. The rear wheels lost traction and the car fishtailed.

Take it easy, she screamed at herself. You've made it. You've gotten away. Don't end up in the far ditch.

She was halfway to Miller's Corners when the loose snow began whipping in a cloud around her. She half heard the dull boom of air being compressed by vast wings. A shadow fell over her, and Dazreel landed astraddle the hood of her car. The metal collapsed with a hollow *whump* as the djinn leaned down to peer curiously at her through the windshield. She began screaming, tearing her throat with short hysterical mindless shrieks that seemed to come from a great distance.

Her screams ended suddenly with a grunt as the front wheels struck the ditch, bringing the car to an abrupt halt. Dazreel lost his balance and flopped over backwards with a glitter of purplish gray and a tangle of canvas-flesh into the snow drifts. Miss Mahan watched in paralyzed shock as he got to his feet, grinning an idiot grin, shaking the snow from his wings, and walked around the car. His wings kept opening and closing slightly to give him balance. Her head turned in quick jerks like a wooden doll, following his movements. He leaned over the car from behind, and the glass of both side windows crumbled with a gravelly sound as his huge fingers poked through to grasp the tops of the doors.

The dim light became even dimmer as his wings spread in a mantle over the car. The snow swirled into the air, and she could see the tips of each wing as it made a downward stroke. The car shifted and groaned and rose from the ground.

She fainted.

A smiling angel face floated out of a golden mist. Soft pink lips moved solicitously, but no sound emerged. Miss Mahan felt a glass

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of water at her mouth and she drank greedily, soothing her raw throat. Sound returned.

"Are you feeling better, Miss Mahan? We don't want you to have a heart attack just yet, do we?" Twilla's eyes glittered with excitement.

Miss Mahan sucked oxygen, fighting the fog in her brain. Then, raw red fingers of anger tore away the silvery panic. She looked at the beautiful monstrous child kneeling before her, the extravagant robe parted enough at the top to reveal a small perfect bare breast. The nipple looked as if it had been rouged. "I'm feeling quite myself again, thank you."

Twilla rose and moved to a facing chair. They were in the parlor. Miss Mahan looked around, but the djinn was absent. Only the parent dolls were there in the same positions.

"Dazreel is back upstairs," Twilla assured her, watching her speculatively. "You have nothing to fear." She smiled slightly. "He will have only virgins."

Miss Mahan felt the blood draining from her face, and she weaved in the chair, feeling the panic creeping back. Twilla threw her head back, and her crystal laugh was harsh and strident, like a chandelier tumbling down marble stairs.

"Miss Mahan, you never cease to amaze me," she gasped. "Imagine! And at your age, too."

The anger returned in full control. "It's none of your business," she stated unequivocally.

"I'm ever so glad you decided to pay me a visit, Miss Mahan. It's, what do you say? Killing two birds with one stone?"

"What do you mean?"

"Dazreel has, as I said, limited, but strong appetites. If they aren't satisfied, he becomes quite unmanageable. And don't think he will reject you because you're a scrawny old crow. He has no taste at all, and only one criterion: virginity." Twilla was almost fidgety with anticipation.

"What possible difference could it make to that monster?" I must be losing my mind, Miss Mahan thought. I'm sitting here having a calm conversation with this wretched child who is going to kill me!

Twilla was thoughtful. "I really don't know. I never thought about it. That's just the way it's always been. It could be a personal idiosyncracy, or perhaps it's religious." She shrugged. "Something like *kosher*, do you think? Anyway, you can't fool him."

"I don't understand any of this," Miss Mahan said in confusion. "Did you say he was a ... a djinn?"

"Surely you've heard of them.

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King Solomon banished the entire race, if you remember." She smiled, pleased. "But I saved Dazreel."

How old are you?" Miss Mahan breathed.

Twilla chuckled. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you. Don't let the body mislead you. It's relatively new. Dazreel has great power if you can control him. But, he's crafty and very literal. One wrong move and ..." She ran her forefinger across her throat.

"But ..." Miss Mahan was completely confused. "If this is all true, why are you going to school in Hawley, Kansas, for heaven's sake?"

Twilla sighed. "Boredom is the curse of the immortal, Miss Mahan. I thought it might offer some diversion."

"If you're so bored with life, why don't you die?"

"Don't be absurd!"

"How could you be so inhuman? What you did to Yvonne ... does life mean nothing to you?"

Twilla shifted in irritation. "Don't be tiresome. How could your brief, insignificant lives concern me?"

There was a restless sound from above. Twilla glanced at the stairs. "Dazreel is becoming impatient." She turned back to Miss Mahan with a smirk. "Are you ready to meet your lover, Miss Mahan?"

Miss Mahan sat frozen, the blood roaring in her ears. "You might as well go," Twilla continued. "It's inevitable. Think of your dignity, Miss Mahan. Do you really want to go kicking and screaming? Or perhaps you'd like another run in the snow?"

Miss Mahan stood up suddenly. "I won't give you the satisfaction," she said calmly. She walked to the stairs, bobbing up and down with one shoe off. Twilla rose and ran after her, circling her in glee.

Twilla leaned against the newel post, blocking the stairs. She smiled wistfully. "I rather envy you, Miss Mahan. I've often wished ... Dazreel knows the ancient Oriental arts, and sex *was* an art." She grimaced. "Now it's like two goats in heat!" Her smile returned. "I've often wished I had the capacity."

Miss Mahan ignored her and marched slowly up the stairs with lopsided dignity. Twilla clapped her hands and backed up ahead of her, taunting her, encouraging her, plucking at her gray tweed coat. Twilla danced around her, swirling the fur robe with graceful turns. Miss Mahan looked straight ahead, one hand on the banister for balance.

Then, at the third step from the top, she stumbled. She fell against the railing and then to her knees. She shifted and sat on the step, rubbing her shins.

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"Don't lose heart now, Miss Mahan," Twilla sang. "We're almost there." Twilla tugged at her coat sleeve. Miss Mahan clutched Twilla's wrist as if she needed help in getting up. Then she heaved with all her might. Twilla's laughter became a gasp and then a shriek as she plummeted down the stairs with a series of very satisfying thumps and crashes. Miss Mahan hurried after her, but the fall had done the job.

Twilla lay on her back a few feet from the bottom step, her body twisted at the wrong angle. She was absolutely motionless except for her face. It contorted in fury, and her eyes were metallic with hate. Her rose-petal lips writhed and spewed the most vile obscenities Miss Mahan had ever imagined, some of them in languages she'd never heard.

"Dazreel!" Twilla keened. "Dazreel! Dazreel!" over and over. A howl reverberated through the house. It shook. Plaster crashed and wood splintered. Dazreel appeared at the top of the stairs, barely able to squeeze through the opening.

Twilla continued her call. Miss Mahan took a trembling step backward. Dazreel started down the steps. Miraculously they didn't collapse. Only the banister splintered and swayed outward.

Miss Mahan commanded herself to think. What did she know about djinns? Very little, practically nothing. Wasn't there supposed to be a controlling device of some sort? A lamp? A bottle? A magic ring? A talisman? Something. She looked at Twilla and then at the djinn. She almost fainted. Dazreel approached the bottom of the stairs with an enormous erection.

She looked frantically at Twilla. She's not wearing rings. Then something caught her eye.

The pendant! Was it the pendant? It had slipped up and over her shoulder and beneath her neck. Miss Mahan scrambled for it. She pushed Twilla's head aside. The child screamed in horrible agony. She grasped the pendant and pulled. The chain cut into the soft flesh of Twilla's neck and then snapped, leaving a red line that oozed blood.

She looked at Dazreel. He had stopped and was looking at her tentatively. It *was* the pendant! "Give it back," Twilla groaned. "Give it back. Please. Please, give it back. It won't do you any good. You don't know how to use it." Dazreel took another step. He stretched his hand toward her. His eyes implored.

Miss Mahan threw the pendant at him. Twilla screamed, and the hair on the back of Miss Mahan's neck bristled. It was not a scream

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of pain or rage, but of the damned. Dazreel's huge hand darted out and caught the pendant. He held his fist to his face and opened his fingers, gazing at what he held. He looked at Miss Mahan and smiled an angelic smile. Then he rippled, like heat waves on the desert, and ... vanished.

Miss Mahan sat on the bottom step, weak with relief, gulping air. She looked at Twilla, as motionless as the parent dolls in the chairs. Only her face moved, twisting in sobs of self-pity. Miss Mahan almost felt sorry for her ... but not quite.

She stood up and walked through the kitchen and out the back door. She thought she knew where it would be. Everyone kept it there. She went to the shed behind the carriage house, floundering through the snow drift. She scooped away the snow to get the door open. She stepped in and looked around. There was almost no light. The scudding clouds seemed even lower and darker, and the single window in the shed was completely grimed over.

She spotted it behind some shovels, misted over with cobwebs. She pushed the shovels aside, grasped the handle and lifted the gasoline can. It was heavy. She shook it. There was a satisfying slosh. She smiled grimly and started back to the house.

Then she stopped and gaped when she saw Leo Whittaker's car parked out of sight behind the house. She hurried on, letting the heavy can bounce against the ground with every other step. She opened the kitchen door and shrieked.

Mrs. Gilbreath stood in the doorway, smiling pleasantly at her, and holding a butcher knife. Without reasoning, without even thinking, Miss Mahan took the handle of the heavy gasoline can in both hands and swung it as hard as she could.

The sharp rim around the bottom caught Mrs. Gilbreath across the face, destroying one eye, shearing away her nose, and opening one cheek. Her expression didn't change. Blood flowed over her pleasant smile as she staggered drunkenly backward.

Miss Mahan lost her balance completely. The momentum of the gasoline can swung her around and she sat in the snow, flat on her skinny bottom. The can slipped from her fingers and bounced across the ground with a descending scale of clangs. She lurched to her feet and looked in the kitchen door. Mrs. Gilbreath had slammed back against the wall and was sitting on the floor, still smiling her gory smile, her right arm twitching like a metronome.

Miss Mahan scrambled after

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the gasoline can and hid it in the pantry. She ducked up the kitchen stairs when she heard footsteps.

Mr. Gilbreath walked through the kitchen, ignoring Mrs. Gilbreath, and went out the back door. Miss Mahan hurried up the stairs. Oh Lord, she thought, I'll be so sore, I can't move for a week.

She entered the upstairs hall from the opposite end. She stepped carefully over the debris from the wall shattered by the djinn. She looked in the bedrooms on the other side. The first one was empty, with a layer of dust, but the second ... She stared. It looked like a set from a Maria Montez movie. A fire burned in the fireplace, and Leo Whittaker lay stark-naked on the fur-covered bed.

"Leo Whittaker!" she bellowed. "Get up from there and put your clothes on this instant!" But he didn't move. He was alive; his chest moved gently as he breathed. She went to him, trying to keep from looking at his nakedness. Then she thought, what the dickens? There's no point in being a prude at this stage. Her eyes widened in admiration. Then she ceded him a few additional points for being able to satisfy Twilla. Why couldn't she have found a beautiful man like that when she was twenty-three, she wondered. She sighed. It wouldn't have made any difference, she guessed.

She put her hand on his shoulder and shook him. He moaned softly and shifted on the bed. "Leo! Wake up! What's the matter with you?" She shook him again. He acted drugged or something. She saw a long golden hair on his stomach and plucked it off, throwing it on the floor. She took a deep breath and slapped him in the face. He grunted. His head lifted slightly and then fell back. "Leo!" she shouted and slapped him again. His body jerked, and his eyes clicked open but didn't focus.

"Leo!" Slap!

"Owww," he said and looked at her. "Miss Mahan?"

"Leo, are you awake?"

"Miss Mahan? What are you doing here? Is Lana all right?" He sat up in the bed and saw the room. He grunted in bewilderment.

"Leo. Get up and get dressed. Hurry!" she commanded. She heard the starter of a car grinding. Leo looked at himself, turned red, and tried to move in every direction at once. Miss Mahan grinned and went to the window. She could hear Leo thumping and bumping as he tried to put his clothes on. The car motor caught, and steam billowed from the carriage house. "Hurry, Leo!" The black Chrysler began slowly backing out, Mr. Gilbreath at the wheel. Then the motor stalled and died.

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He's trying to get away, she thought. No, he's only a puppet. He's planning to take Twilla away! She turned back to Leo. He was dressed, sitting on the edge of the bed, putting on his shoes. He looked at her shame-faced, like a little boy.

"Leo," she said in her sternest, most no-nonsense unruly-child voice. The car motor started again. "Don't ask any questions. Go down the kitchen stairs and to your car. Hurry as fast as you can. Don't let Mr. Gilbreath see you. Bring your car around to the front and to the end of the lane. Block the lane so Mr. Gilbreath can't get out. Keep yourself locked in your car because he's dangerous. Do you understand?"

"No," he said, shaking his head.

"Never mind. Will you do what I said?"

He nodded.

"All right, then. Hurry!" They left the bedroom. Leo gave it one last bewildered glance. They ran down the kitchen stairs as fast as they could, Leo keeping her steady. She propelled him out the back door before he could see Mrs. Gilbreath still smiling and twitching. The black Chrysler was just pulling around to the front of the house.

She ran to the pantry, retrieved the gasoline can, and staggered into the entry hall. She could see Mr. Gilbreath getting out of the car. She locked the door and hobbled into the parlor. Twilla had been moved to the divan and covered with a quilt. He shouldn't have moved her, Miss Mahan thought; with an injury like that it could have killed her.

Twilla saw her enter and began screeching curses at her. Miss Mahan shook her head. She put the gasoline can down by the divan and tried to unscrew the cap on the spout. It wouldn't budge. It was rusted solid. Miss Mahan growled in frustration. The front door began to rattle and clatter.

Twilla's curses stopped suddenly, and Miss Mahan looked at her. Twilla was staring at her in round-eyed horror. Miss Mahan went to the fireplace and got the poker. Twilla's eyes followed her. She drew the poker back and swung it as hard as she could at the gasoline can. It made a very satisfactory hole. She swung the poker several more times and tossed it away. She picked up the can as Twilla began to scream and plead. She rested it on the back of the divan and stripped away the blanket. She tipped it over, and pale-pink streams of gasoline fell on Twilla.

Glass shattered in the front door. Miss Mahan left the can resting on the back of the divan,

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still gurgling out its contents, and went to the fireplace again. She picked up the box of matches as Mr. Gilbreath walked in. His expression didn't change as he hurried toward her. She took a handful of wooden matches. She struck them all on the side of the box and tossed them on Twilla.

Twilla's screams and the flames ballooned upward together. Mr. Gilbreath shifted directions and waded into the flames, reaching for Twilla. Miss Mahan ran out of the house as fast as she could.

She was past the black Chrysler, its motor still running, when the gasoline can exploded. Leo had parked his car where she told him. Now he jumped out and ran to her. They looked at the old Peacock house.

It was old and dry as dust. The flames engulfed it completely. The snow was melting in a widening circle around it. They had to back all the way to Leo's car because of the heat.

They heard a siren and turned to see Sheriff Walker's car hurrying down the lane, followed by some of the funeral procession on its way back to Hawley. The ones who hadn't turned down the road were stopped on the highway, looking.

"Leo, dear," she said. "Do you know what you're doing here?"

He rubbed his hand across his face, his eyes still a little bleary. "Yes. I think so. It all seems like a dream. Twilla ... Miss Mahan," he said in pain. "I don't know why I did it."

"I do," she said soothingly and put her arm around him. "And it wasn't your fault. You have to believe that. Don't tell Lana or anyone. Forget it ever happened. Do you understand?"

He nodded as Robin Walker got out of his car and ran toward them. He looks very handsome in his uniform, she thought. My, my, I've suddenly become very conscious of good-looking men. Too bad it's thirty years too late.

"Miss Mahan? Leo? What's going on here?" Robin asked in bewilderment. "Is anyone still in there?" He looked at her feet. "Miss Mahan, why are you running around in the snow with only one shoe on?"

She followed his gaze. "I'll declare," she said in astonishment. "I didn't know I'd lost it. Leo. Robin, let's get in your car. I have a lot to tell you both."

Miss Mahan sat before the fireplace in her comfortable old house, tearing the pages from her Twilla journal and feeding them one at a time to the fire. Paul Sullivan had doctored her cuts and bruises, and she felt wonderful — stiff and sore, to be sure — but wonderful. Tomorrow the news would be all over town that, with

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brilliant detective work, Robin Walker, aided by Leo Whittaker, had discovered that Twilla Gilbreath's father was Yvonne's killer. In an attempt to arrest him the house had burned and all three had perished.

She had told Robin and Leo everything that happened — well, almost everything. She had left out her own near encounter with Dazreel and a few other related items. She had also given the impression — sort of — that the house had burned by accident. Poor sweet Robin hadn't believed a word of it. But after hearing Leo's account, taking a look at her demolished car, and seeing the footprints in the snow, he finally, grudgingly, agreed to go along with it. And it did explain all the mysteries of Yvonne's death.

She knew the *public* story was full of holes and loose ends, but she also knew the people in Hawley. They wanted to hear that an outsider had done it, and they wanted to hear that he had been discovered. Their own imaginations would fill in the gaps.

Lana Whittaker didn't really believe that Leo was working with Robin all those nights he was away, but they loved each other enough. They'd be all right.

She fed the last pages to the fire and looked around her parlor. She decided to put up a tree this year. She hadn't bothered with one in years. And a party. She'd have a party. There hadn't been more than three people in the house at one time in ages.

She hobbled creakily up the stairs, humming "Deck the Hall with Boughs of Holly," considerably off key, heading for the attic to search for the box of Christmas tree ornaments.

Special Notice To Subscribers

Beginning with the November issue, the address label will be affixed directly to the back cover of F&SF. The elimination of the wrapper is partially a result of skyrocketing increases in the cost of paper and handling. However, it will also speed delivery of your copy and eliminate the glue which sometimes tore the front cover when the wrapper was removed. You may have noticed that magazines such as Harpers, Atlantic and Esquire are now mailed the same way.

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The story of a survivor downed on an out-of-the-way world with no hope of immediate rescue, with no companions, with no goal but the irrational desire to reach Cathadonia's ocean. Michael Bishop's fine novella "The White Otters of Childhood," (F&SF, July 1973) was recently a Nebula award nominee.

Cathadonian Odyssey

by MICHAEL BISHOP

Cathay. Caledonia. Put the words together: Cathadonia. That was what the namer of the planet, a murderer with the sensitivity of a poet, had done. He had put the two exotic words together — Cathay and Caledonia — so that the place they designated might have a name worthy of its own bewitching beauty. Cathadonia. Exotic, far-off, bewitching, incomprehensible. A world of numberless pools. A world of bizarrely constituted "orchards." a world with one great, gong-tormented sea.

Cathadonia.

And the first thing that men had done there, down on the surface, was kill as many of the exotic little tripodal natives as their laser pistols could dispatch.

Squiddles, the men off the merchantship had called them. They called them other fanciful names, too, perhaps inspired by the sensitive murderer who had coined the planet's name. *Treefish. Porpurls. Fintails. Willowpusses. Tridderlings. Devil apes.*

The names didn't matter. The men killed the creatures wantonly, brutally, laughingly. For sport. For nothing but sport. They were off the merchantship *Golden* heading homeward from a colonized region of the galactic arm. They made planetfall because no one had really noticed Cathadonia before and because they were ready for a rest. Down on the surface, for relaxation's sake, they killed the ridiculous-looking squiddles. Or treefish. Or porpurls. Or willow-pusses. Take your choice of names. The names didn't matter.

Once home, the captain of the *Golden* reported a new planet to the authorities. He used the name Cathadonia, the murderer's coinage, and Cathadonia was the name that went into the books. The captain said nothing about his

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crewmen's sanguinary recreation on the planet. How could he? Instead, he gave coordinates, reported that the air was breathable, and volunteered the information that Cathadonia was beautiful. "Just beautiful, really just beautiful."

The men of the *Golden,* after all, were not savages. Hadn't one of them let the word Cathadonia roll off his lips in a moment of slaughterous ecstasy? Didn't the universe forgive its poets, its name givers?

Later, Earth sent the survey probeship *Nobel,* on its way to the virgin milkiness of the Magellanic Clouds, in the direction of Cathadonia. The *Nobel,* in passing, dropped a descentcraft toward the planet's great ocean. The three scientists aboard that descentcraft were to establish a floating station whose purpose would be to determine the likelihood of encountering life on Cathadonia. The captain of the *Golden* had not mentioned life. The scientists did not know it existed there. Preliminary sensor scans from the *Nobel* suggested the presence of botonicals and the possibility of some sort of inchoate aquatic life. Nothing sentient, surely.

Whatever the situation down there, the scientists aboard the floating station would unravel it.

Unfortunately, something happened to the descentcraft on its way down, something that never happaned to survey descentcraft and therefore something the *Nobel's* crew had made no provision for. In fact, the *Nobel,* as was usual in these cases, went on without confirming touchdown; it went on toward the Magellanic Clouds. And some odd, anomalous force wrenched the controls of the descentcraft out of the hands of its pilots and hurled it planetward thousands of kilometers from the great ocean.

It fell to the surface beside a sentinel willow on the banks of one of Cathadonia's multitudinous pools. There it crumpled, sighed, ticked with alien heat.

This, then, becomes the story of a survivor — the story of Maria Jill Ian, a woman downed on an out-of-the-way world with no hope of immediate rescue, with no companions to share her agony, with no goal but the irrational desire to reach Cathadonia's ocean. A woman who did not wholly understand what had happened to her. A woman betrayed by her own kind and ambivalently championed by a creature carrying out a larger betrayal.

— For Cathadonia.

I am standing on Cathadonia, first planet from an ugly little star that Arthur called Ogre's Heart. I

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am writing in a logbook that is all I have left of the materials in our descentcraft. God knows why I am writing.

Arthur is dead. Fischelson is dead. The Nobel *is on its way to the Magellanic Clouds. It will be back in three months. Small comfort. I will be dead, too. Why am I not dead now?*

The "landscape" about me is dotted with a thousand small pools. Over each pool a single willowlike tree droops its head. The pools are clear, I have drunk from them. And the long, slender leaves of the willows — or at least of this willow — contain a kind of pulp that I have eaten. Trees at nearby pools appear to bear fruit.

But drinking and eating are painful exercises now, and I don't know why I do it. Arthur and Fischelson are dead.

The light from Ogre's Heart sits on the faces of the thousand pools as if they were mirrors. Mirrors. Mirrors wherein I might drown and rediscover the painlessness of who I was before....

Maria Jill Ian did not die. She slept by the wreck of the descentcraft. She slept two of Cathadonia's days, then part of a third. The silver lacery of the pulpwillow shaded her during the day, kept off the rains at night.

When she finally woke and began to live again, she "buried" Arthur and Fischelson by tying pieces of the descentcraft's wreckage to their mangled bodies and dragging them to the edge of the pool. Then she waded into the mirror surface and felt the slick pool weeds insinuate themselves between her toes. A strong woman well into middle-age, she sank first Fischelson's body and then that of Arthur, her husband. She held the men under and maneuvered the weights on their corpses so that neither of them would float up again. She was oblivious to the smell of their decaying bodies; she knew only that it would be very easy to tie a weight about her own waist and then walk deeper into the pool.

The day after accomplishing these burials, Maria Jill Ian looked away to the western horizon and began walking toward the pools that glimmered there. Just as she had not known why she bothered to eat and drink, she did not now understand why the horizon should draw her implacably toward the twilight baths of Ogre's Heart.

Later she would rediscover her reasons, but now she simply did what she must.

Today I walked a distance I can't accurately determine. My feet fell on the pliant verges of at least a hundred ponds.

A small thing has happened to keep me going.

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The trees over the pools have begun to change. Although their long branches still waterfall to the pools' surfaces, not all these trees are the pulpwillows that stand sentinel in the region where Arthur, Fischelson, and I crashed. Some have brilliant scarlet blossoms; some have trunks that grow in gnarled configurations right out of the pools' centers; some are heavy with globular fruit; some are naked of all adornment and trail their boughs in the water like skeletal hands.

But I've eaten of the trees that bear fruit, and this fruit has been sweet and bursting with flavor, invariably. It's strange that I don't really care for any of it. Still, it's nourishment.

The sky turns first blazing white at twilight, then yellow like lemons, then a brutal pink. And at night the trees stand in stark tableaux that hail me onward.

I still hurt. I still hurt terribly, from the crash, from my loss — but I'm beginning to heal. After sleeping, I'll continue to walk away from Arthur and Fischelson — in the direction of falling, ever-falling Ogre's Heart....

One morning Maria Jill Ian came to a pond beside which grew a huge umbrellalike tree of gold and scarlet. The tree bore a kind of large thick-shelled, mahogany-colored nut rather than the commonplace varieties of fruit she had been living on for the past two or three days.

She decided to stop and eat.

The nuts, however, hung high in the branches of the tree. Its twisted bole looked as if it might allow her to climb to the higher entanglements where she could gather food as she liked. Her simple foil jumpsuit did not impede her climbing. Leaves rustled and flashed. She gained a place where she could rest, and stopped.

All about her the pools of Cathadonia lay brilliant and blinding beneath their long-fingered sentinel trees.

Ogre's Heart was moving up the sky.

Maria Jill Ian turned her head to follow the sun's squat ascent. In the whiteness cascading through the branches overhead, she saw a shape — a shape at least as large as a small man, a form swaying over her, eclipsing the falling light, a thing more frightening than the realization that she was light-years from Earth, stranded.

Not thinking, merely reacting, she stepped to the branch below her and then swung out from the willow. She landed on the marshy ground beside the pond, caught herself up, and scrabbled away.

Something vaguely tentacular plunged from the scarlet-and-gold umbrella of the tree and disap-

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peared noiselessly into the pool.

Maria Jill Ian began to run. She ran westward, inevitably toward another pool, struggling in ground that squelched around her boots, looking back now and again in an effort to see the thing that had plunged.

She saw the silver water pearl up, part, and stream down the creature's narrow head. It was going to pursue her, she knew. Although it came on comically, it flailed with a deftness that demolished the impulse to laugh. Maria Jill Ian did not look back again.

All of Cathadonia breathed with her as, desperately, she ran.

I call him Bracero. It's a joke. He has no arms; he swims like the much-maligned "wetbacks" of another time. I don't know what sort of creature he is.

A description?

Very well. To begin: Bracero has no arms, but in other respects he resembles a man-sized spider monkey — except his body is absolutely hairless, smooth as the hide of a porpoise, a whitish-blue like the surfaces of Cathadonia's pools.

To continue: He is arboreal and aquatic at once. He uses his feet and his sleek prehensile tail to climb to the uppermost branches of any poolside willow. Conversely, his armlessness has streamlined his upper torso to such an extent that he can slide through the water like a cephalopod. Indeed, he moves with the liquid grace of an octopus, although one who is five times over an amputee.

To conclude: What disarms even me is Bracero's face. It is small, expressive, curious, and winning. The eyes are an old man's (sometimes), the mouth a baby's, the ears a young girl's. The trauma of our first meeting has slipped out of our memories, just as Ogre's Heart plunges deathward at twilight.

We are friends, Bracero and I.

The creature had caught up with her when she could run no more. Halfway between two of the planet's glimmering pools Maria Jill Ian collapsed and waited for the thing to fall upon her.

Instead, it stopped at a small distance and regarded her almost sympathetically, she thought. Its body put her in mind of a small boy sitting on a three-legged stool, his arms clasped behind his back as if desirous of looking penitent. She lay unmoving on the marshy earth, staring at the creature over one muddied forearm.

Blinking occasionally, it stared back.

Finally she got up and went on to the next pool, where she leaned

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against the trunk of an especially blasted-looking tree. The naked creature with two supple legs and a lithe tail — or another leg — followed her, almost casually. It made a wide arc away from Maria Jill Ian and came in behind the willow she was leaning upon. Stoic now, she didn't even look to see what it was doing.

To join Arthur, to join Fischelson, to join the centuries' countless dead, would not be unpleasant, she thought.

The eel-beast hoisted itself into the willow and climbed silently to the highest branches. Then it hung there, looking down at her like a suddenly sullen child swinging by his knees.

That evening, her fear gone, she named the creature Bracero. On the second day beside this pond she saw how it fed.

Ogre's Heart gave them a characteristically magnesium-bright dawn. Sentinel trees cast shadows like carefully penned lines of indigo ink. A thousand mirror pools turned from slate to silver. Lying on her back, Maria opened her eyes and witnessed something she didn't entirely believe.

Bracero was still high in the tree. He clutched a narrow branch with his "tail" and both "feet," his head and torso swaying gently, freely, like a live pendulum.

Clusters of mahogany-colored nuts swayed, too, in the dawn wind.

Then, looking up, Maria Jill Ian saw one of the oversized nuts snap away from the others and float directly up to the creature that had pursued her. Bracero took one foot away from the limb, grasped the willownut, expertly shelled it, and fed himself.

Several times he repeated this procedure, on each occasion the willownut floating within his reach seemingly of its own volition.

The Earth woman stood up and watched in astonishment. Bracero paid her no mind until she moved as if to obtain her own breakfast. Then he shifted in the uppermost branches, descended a little, and made *screeing* noises with his teeth. Maria decided not to go after the mahogany-colored shells that split, so easily it seemed, into meat-filled hemispheres. Did Bracero intend to deny her access to food? Would she have to fight?

Then a willownut fell toward her. But it broke its own fall in midair, bobbed sideways, and floated just beyond her startled hands — a miniature planet, brown and crustily wrinkled, halted in its orbit just at eye level. Bracero had stopped making *screeing* sounds.

Maria Jill Ian looked up. Then she gratefully took the gift and ate.

For the next several weeks she did not have to clamber into a tree again to obtain her food, nor search

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among the sodden grasses where the fruits and nuts sometimes fell. Bracero saw to her wants. When these were filled, he plunged out of the sentinel willows and rippled the mirror pools. Blithely he swam — until the woman made a move to continue her odyssey westward. Then he again followed.

Maria supposed that the only payment Bracero wanted for serving her was the pleasure of her company. She didn't mind, but she couldn't stay her urge to march relentlessly on Cathadonia's western horizon. Something there pulled her, compelled her onward.

Bracero has telekinetic abilities. He's been with me for almost twelve days now, as best as I'm able to reckon days — and I've been trying very hard to mark the successive risings and settings of Ogre's Heart since it is impossible to determine time by distances covered or landmarks passed.

But for slight variations in the willows, the terrain of Cathadonia is beautifully self-repeating. Looking at it, I can't understand why Bracero is the only native of the planet I have so far encountered; he is so meticulously adapted to this environment that there must be others like him. Can it be that the men of the Golden *were unfortunate enough to miss seeing even one creature like Bracero?*

A word about telekinesis, Bracero's uncanny skill at manipulating objects at a distance.

He does it for me every day, several times a day, and does so for himself as well; afterwards, he appears no worse for this not inconsiderable psychic strain than during times of simple physical activity. His mind is as sleek as his body.

Just today, for instance, I have seen him move the casabalike melons of an unusual willow that we passed this morning. He moved them, in fact, all the way to the pool where we're now loitering. This is no mean distance. It indicates that Bracero can extend his psychic aura to far locations, fix upon a specific object, and draw it toward him at will. Without noticeable aftereffects.

Ordinarily, though, he puts under his influence only those foodstuffs in the trees by which we stop. The casabas (if I can call them that) were a rare exception, a treat that he lovingly tendered to both of us. And although I seldom think about what I eat, I enjoyed these melons, and Bracero seemed to appreciate the delight I took in them.

He has an intelligence which is both animal and human. I have begun to talk to him as if he were a close friend, or a small child, or (I hesitate to write this) a new

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incarnation of Arthur. Bracero watches me when I talk, and listens — truly listens.

But I'm off the subject.

I'm still amazed at the placidity with which Bracero accomplishes his psychokinetic feats, the childish nonchalance *of this supranormal juggling. Does it cost him nothing?*

Aboard the Nobel, *of course, we have two PK mediums: Langland Smart and Margaret Riva. Langland is the older, and his abilities are more fully developed than Margaret's. In free-fall he can maneuver an unresisting, hypnotized subject in any direction he wants, can make the subject raise an arm and scratch his nose, can settle him gently into a padded lift-seat.*

But afterwards, and even during, Langland pays. He loses weight, suffers dizziness, has nightmares and insomnia later — and his heartbeat does not fall back into a steady, safe rhythm for hours, sometimes two or three days, after such activity.

It's the same with Margaret, although she can move only small objects and these only across relatively smooth surfaces. She has no ability to levitate things, as do Langland and, more impressively, Bracero. And only Bracero does not pay for the mental forces which he so astonishingly commands over the inert.

The Nobel, *meanwhile, expected us to find this watery orchard of a planet uninhabited. Did the men off that merchantship see only pools and trees when they set down here? Arthur and I talked to its captain before we left. He was a nervous ferret of a man....*

Ogre's Heart has set. I'm going to stop writing. In the morning we'll be off again. I wonder how much longer it will be before we're there. The willows to the west, the pools limning the horizon — these things call me.

But for tonight it would be nice if Cathadonia had a moon....

For the next two days Maria Jill Ian kept up her compulsive journeying, through terrain that did not alter.

She began to suspect that Bracero was observing her for others of his own kind, that he followed her and fed her not merely to enjoy her company but to maintain a keen and critical surveillance of her movements. She was not an unintelligent woman, by any means, and she was as susceptible to doubts as any healthy paranoid human being.

She believed that she had evidence of Bracero's communicating telepathically with other members of his species. Her evidence consisted of the fact that she still hadn't stumbled across a

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single one of Bracero's brethren. Before the two of them approached each new willow, each new pool, her sleek friend undoubtedly "wired" ahead an imperative to stay out of sight. The recipient of this communication undoubtedly dove into the water and remained there, nearly insensate, until they departed. Undoubtedly.

That was what Maria Jill Ian believed, and once, as they approached, she saw rings on the surface of a pool. Bracero had been careless, she surmised, and wired his warning later than usual. The slowly fading rings on the surface of the pond corroborated her suspicions. But, of course, she saw nothing but the tree and the water when they had fully arrived. Little corroboration, very little indeed.

Her affection for Bracero did not dwindle because of these suspicions; surely, he did only what he must. Also, none of his brethren had made any hostile move against her. There had been no assaults on her person, nor even any attempts to impede their trek westward.

Maybe Bracero's people had decided jointly to save both her and them the confusion, the upheaval, of further contact. Because he'd seen her first, Bracero had necessarily assumed the combined role of his people's roving watchman and Maria Jill Ian's solicitous escort. She was sure that he returned at least a small portion of the affection she felt for him. His attitude, his expressive face, conveyed as much.

One evening (the evening after she had written the last log entry) they stopped for the night, and Bracero moved as if to clamber up into the inevitable willow. Involuntarily, Maria held up her hand.

"Don't go up there," she said. "There'll be plenty of time to eat. Stay down here." She patted the ground beside her. "We'll talk."

Bracero responded as if he understood her.

His bluish porpoise's skin gleaming in the twilight, he faced her and assumed his comical tripod stance about two meters away. He appeared quite ready to converse — as clinically receptive, Maria thought, as a probeship psychiatrist. His smooth brow was slightly wrinkled, his eyes looked upon her with the estranging narrowness of a devilfish's eyes. Still, his posture suggested no hostility.

Maria Jill Ian talked:

"I'm not a dependent woman, Bracero. I know what I'm about. Even now I realize that what draws me on isn't entirely rational. Maybe not rational at all. I know that my loss of Arthur and my idea of home may not be redeemed by following Ogre's Heart to the horizon every day — but because I understand my irrationality, I know what I'm

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doing. Do you see that, Bracero? One day I'll explain myself to you with more certainty, much more."

Bracer shifted his position. His expression allowed her to think that he did see her point, intuitively.

"Arthur and I used to talk, Bracero. Sometimes without words. Neither of us was dependent on the other, though we were somehow wordlessly interdependent. I know. That sounds like a contradiction — but it's not, not really.

"We had an affinity — a love, you have to call it — that synchronized our feelings and moods in a way not at all mechanical, a spiritual meshing. This was our interdependence, Bracero.

"But we could function with the same rigorous smoothness while apart. He worked his work, I mine; and our shared independence only bound us that much more closely in our love. I miss him, Bracero, I wish he were here beside me now — so that we could talk again, even wordlessly. As before."

She paused. The far ponds twinkled with the day's last light.

"Did you know that I didn't even weep when I buried Fischelson and my husband, when I sank them to the bottom of the pool two weeks behind us? I still can't weep, Bracero. The memory of Arthur's total *aliveness* is still too powerful.

"So different from other men," she concluded. "So different from the cruel ones, the petty ones, the men with stupid hates and overbearing passions. Fischelson, too. Both of them so different."

Maria Jill Ian fell silent. It had done her good to talk, especially to a listener who seemed so congenial. She wished that Bracero could talk. Since he couldn't, she said, "I think Arthur would approve of what we're doing."

A moment later she said, "You don't have to sit there any more, Bracero. You can climb up into the willow if you like."

Bracero didn't move immediately. He waited as if refraining from the subtle rudeness of leaving too quickly. Then he gracefully swung himself aloft. He hung by his tail from a low limb.

More than on any other similar occasion, Maria Jill Ian was grateful for the Cathadonian's seemingly intentional courtesy. If he were deceiving her, she didn't care.

My hands are trembling almost too violently to write this.

The night before last, I engaged in a long monologue and made Bracero listen to me hold forth on independence, communication, spiritual meshing, love, et cetera.

We haven't moved from this pool, this willow, since that night. The reasons are astounding, they're

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out of the pale of credibility — but my heart, my head, my trembling hands all attest to their realness. I have to put it down here. I have to set it down as everything happened — even if my scrawl is ultimately illegible even to me.

On the morning after our "conversation," I awoke and looked up to find Bracero. He was there, his legs and tail wrapped around a branch. When I stood, I could almost look him squarely in his topsy-turvy eyes, eyes that were open but glazed over as if with cataracts.

"Wake up," I said.

He didn't move. His cephalopod's clouded eyes looked as removed from me as two useless, tarnished Earth coins.

"It's morning, it's time to get going again, Bracero."

He didn't move, still didn't move, and a kind of subdued panic gripped me. I thought that I would try a feint, a bluff, to see if that wouldn't set the good warm blood circulating through him again.

"I'm going," I said. "You can join me if you like."

That said, I set off briskly and had slogged through a good half a kilometer of unending marshland before I actually convinced myself that Bracero wasn't going to follow and that it was wrong to leave him there: a sort of Cathadonian possum who had never before put on the stiff, frightening mask of Death.

I went back.

Bracero wasn't dead. I could tell that by putting my hand against his gimlet-hole nostrils and feeling the rapid but quiet warmth of his breathing. He was in a trance, a coma, a state of suspended animation — but not really any of these things, though, because his breathing was hurried, his sleek body feverish, his pulse (which I found in his throat) telegraphically insistent. Only in his relation to the ground was Bracero suspended; otherwise, his stupor — though deep — was very animate.

I felt I had to stay by him even if it meant losing a day to our assault on the horizon; I was morally obligated. Morally obligated. Too, my affection for Bracero has deepened to a point that embarrasses me. Even the horrible manner in which he chose to demonstrate his feeling for me has not turned me against him — though my hands shake, my head swims.

All of yesterday I stayed by him. Bracero didn't improve; his condition altered not at all.

Occasionally I fetched water in a bag made of my overtunic and then moistened Bracero's face. I tried to put food in his mouth — pulp from the willow's leaves, some nut meat I had saved, a piece of

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fruit — but his mouth wouldn't accept these gifts; they dribbled from his lips.

I went to sleep when Ogre's Heart set. I had nightmares. Shapes moved, voices sang, eerie winds hissed. The awful clamminess *of Cathadonia seeped into my bones.*

Then, before this ugly little sun had come up again, in the haggard, predawn glimmering of the pool, I saw a shape of genuine substance. A shape that wasn't Bracero. A shape floating over the pool.

It was a medieval vision, a fever picture out of Dante.

I screamed into the haggard silence. Inside, I am still screaming; the horrible no-sound of this inward screaming deafens my mind to my heart. Otherwise I couldn't even write this down.

Over the pool, stretched out there as if asleep on his back, a piece of our mangled descentcraft pulling his left leg down into the water, floated Arthur's corpse — horrible, horrible, horrible.

Mercilessly, Ogre's Heart came up to light this fever picture. And nothing I could do would stay its coming.

Maria Jill Ian calmed herself. For the second time in two weeks she waded into one of Cathadonia's pools and laid her husband to rest. She caught Arthur's beautiful, hideous body in her arms. The force that had been holding him in state above the water flicked off and shifted Arthur's melancholy weight entirely to her.

A strong woman, Maria Jill Ian accepted this weight. She lowered her no-longer-human, plundered-of-dignity husband gently into the pool. The anchor she had tied to him two weeks ago pulled him down, but she refused to let him sink away. She supported him. Strangely, it seemed that invisible hands in the water helped her steady Arthur's body and slide him with precision into the silt below.

But Bracero still hung from the branch where he had remained during the whole of his "illness." Weeping quietly, Maria waded toward him.

"You did that for me, didn't you, Bracero? You brought me my husband because I said I wanted him beside me again."

A bitter gift. Over an incredible distance, a distance that it had taken them fourteen of Cathadonia's days to walk, Bracero had exerted his will upon the dead Arthur Ian and reeled him in with his mind — in the space of two nights and one waking period.

The Earth woman could not bring herself to condemn the eel-beast, the agent of her horror. Although her heart still beat savagely, and her eyes were raw

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with the sting of salt, she couldn't condemn him.

"No matter what I wish about my husband now, Bracero, let him sleep in peace," she said. "But understand me now: I can respect you for this, I can respect you for your sacrifice."

And Bracero was looking at her again, she saw, with eyes more like a feeble old man's than a devilfish's. His breathing had slowed, too. His limbs and tail appeared less rigid. Three hours later he rippled out of the tree's golden umbrella and took up his expectant, tripod stance only a meter away from her.

The Earth woman pulled on her boots and looked back toward the east, at Ogre's Heart climbing the pale, yellow sky.

"You're right," she said. "It's time to go again. We've got to forget this place. Arthur wouldn't want us to linger here."

They ate — Bracero ravenously, she only a little — and set off again. Toward the horizon, the western horizon.

We were able to walk, to slog westward, only a half day today — because of Bracero's most recent telekinetic exploit and its aftermath. I've resolved never to think of Arthur as I saw him this morning, but to remember him as he was when I met him, and as he grew to be over the years of our marriage.

I don't know why, but I haven't written here how wearying it is to trek across Cathadonia. The ground sucks at your feet, the marshy soil betrays your sense of balance, the lack of firmness tortures your knees. The muscles in my calves have become extremely hard, my upper thighs like supple marble. Even so, it's sometimes difficult to keep going.

Today, amazingly, I kept going by talking to Bracero. (I still haven't learned my lesson.) I told him everything I could remember about Arthur. Even quotes.

"I'm as hardy as you are," I told Bracero. "Men are hardy creatures. Arthur used to say, 'Men are the ultimate vermin, Maria, as indefatigable as cockroaches, capable of outlasting the universe.' I guess that's why I can keep up with you — go beyond you even."

Even though I can't really go beyond Bracero.

He doesn't have the same trouble with Cathadonia's marshiness that I do. His body is less heavy; his slender limbs are capable of skimming the ground almost without touching it. Usually he swims each of the pools that we come to and reemerges at the western shore, where he lets me catch up with him. But this afternoon, seeing that I wanted to

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talk, he stayed beside me every step and listened to my schoolgirl's chatter, my woman's wisdom, with the diplomacy of a probeship captain.

Once of twice he immersed himself in a pond, but he always came back, his glistening face radiating a depth of awareness about me, Maria Jill Ian, that I've seen before only in Arthur's face. And so I talked to him of Arthur, fed on Bracero's sympathy, and didn't tire — even though so much talking ought to have made me short of breath.

Once, when we rested and ate, I told him how important it was that we continue pursuing the horizon. I even recited to him from Arthur's favorite poem. And Bracero seemed to respond to the lines as if he understood and even approved the sentiment.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are:
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

More than I ever thought I could lose has been taken from me, but Bracero's companionship and my own strength remain. These things abide. They make it possible to go on with free hearts, free foreheads, toward the westering sun of Cathadonia.

So be it, Arthur, so be it....

And so they went on, day after day, seeing no one, encountering terrain that repeated itself over and over again — though the fact that they now and again came across a tree that bore different kinds of fruit, or blossoms, or nut capsules, convinced Maria Jill Ian that they were actually making progress.

At last Maria remembered that Cathadonia had an ocean, that eventually these endlessly recurring pools would send out tentacles, link arms, and spill into one another like countless telepathic beings sharing a single liquid mind.

Fischelson, Arthur, and she had made one complete orbit of the planet in their descentcraft before attempting to land, and, she remembered, they had seen the great ocean from the air. How had they fallen so short of their goal? Indeed, what force had so cruelly wrenched the descentcraft from them and sped it raging planetward?

Such things never happened.

Now all Maria Jill Ian had to

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live for was her march upon that ocean. The ocean. The Sea of Stagnation, Fischelson had suggested before something unprecedented wiped out the two men's lives and her own memory. But now, but now, it couldn't be far, that ocean.

Day-by-day, Bracero kept pace with her — loping, swimming, outdistancing her when he wished, sometimes lagging playfully behind.

Then he began to lag behind more often, and there was nothing playful in it. Frequently Maria had to call him, almost scold, in order to summon him on.

He came, but he came reluctantly. At each new pool he plunged in and made her wait while he swam five or six more turns than he had taken in the early days of their journeying.

But Maria Jill Ian always waited for him. To leave Bracero now would be to default on a trust. The two of them, after all, still belonged together. Despite his now chronic straggling, even Bracero seemed to recognize this.

One evening, as they prepared for sleep, Maria looked out over their pond and was struck by its size. It was several times larger than the one beside which their descentcraft had crashed. In fact, it had the dimensions of a small lake.

The sentinel tree that bordered this pool trailed its long leaves only in the shallows of the pool's margin, not out over the center.

Why hadn't she noticed before? All of the pools they had passed recently were at least of this size, the trees all as proportionately dwindled in stature as the one she leaned against now. Looking westward, she saw the silhouettes of far fewer trees etched into the lavender sky, than she had seen at twilight only a few days past. The change had occurred so gradually, so imperceptibly, that it was only now apparent to her.

"Bracero!" she called.

The lithe Cathadonian, who had long since learned his name, dropped gracefully from the tree and sat inches away from her.

"We're approaching the ocean, aren't we? Is that why you've been lagging? Does that have something to do with it?"

Bracero looked at her. His stare attempted both to answer her and to comprehend whatever it was compelling her toward the sea. Maria Jill Ian could read these things in the creature's face.

"Let me try to explain," she said. "I'm going toward your great ocean because Arthur, Nathan Fischelson, and I were trying to reach it when something happened to us. Second, I'm going there because all life on Earth, my own planet, arose in the seas. Do you understand, Bracero? That cellular

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memory is all I have left of home, a little planet in this spiral arm, ninety light-years distant.

"To me, your ocean represents ours.

"That must be how it is. And our oceans whisper to me across the light-years — with the surf noises of Earth, the seething of our species' spawning place."

Maria Jill Ian put her hand to her face. What she had just spoken filled her with an indefinable fear of the cosmos — of its infinite capacity to awe, to stagger, to overwhelm.

"And third," she said finally, "your ocean draws me on because it lies there, to the west...."

I'm afraid. This time is like the other, when I awoke and saw Arthur floating above the dawnlit pool.

But it isn't dawn, it's late afternoon, and in our slender willow Bracero hangs suspended with the glazed look and the catatonic rigidity of that last time. But this, this is the fifth day, and he hasn't eaten or drunk since this violent trance began. His body is incredibly hot.

I'm afraid because the planet seems to be in sympathy with Bracero's efforts, whatever they are.

Two days ago I deserted Bracero and began walking again, in hopes that he would come out of his trance and follow. Instead, when I reached the one semifirm passageway between the two lakes west of here, their surfaces were suddenly riven with roaring waterspouts that reared up taller than the sentinel willows on their banks. The waterspouts rained torrents on the isthmus where I hoped to pass.

I had to turn back. When I reached Bracero, he was swinging more violently than ever, rocking feverishly.

I'm afraid because even though he calmed a little after my departure-and-return, all of Cathadonia still seems a part of his effort.

Several times a day a waterspout forms on this lake and on all the lakes that I can see from here. These funnels snarl and pirouette, flashing light and color like giant prisms.

I think perhaps Bracero has enlisted, telepathically, the aid of all his people. From all their individual pools they strain with him in this new enterprise, working through Bracero as if he were the principal unit in their mind link.

I'm afraid because the skies have several times clouded over during the middle of the day, eclipsing Ogre's Heart and suffusing the world in indigo blackness.

Then the rains fall.

Then the clouds strip themselves away, as in time-lapse

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sequences, and shred themselves into thin wisps that let the glaring light of Ogre's Heart pour down again.

Even now I can feel the wind rising, the planet trembling. Bracero seems vexed to nightmare by his own rocking, metronomic ecstasy. I'm afraid, I'm afraid....

On the sixth day the wind was of hurricane force, and Maria Jill Ian heard the voices of Cathadonia's great ocean calling to her through the gale. She could scarcely hear herself think, but she heard these phantom voices as if they were siren-crooning from the inside of her head.

Astonishingly, Bracero clung with uncanny strength to his branch. Although his head and torso lifted and fell with every gust, it seemed that nothing could shake him loose.

Maria held on to the bole of their willow and kept her eyes closed Was the world ending? At last she risked being blown to her death; she let go of the tree, pulled off her foil overtunic, stripped it into ragged pieces. With these, she lashed herself to the willow and waited for the storm to end, or for her life to go out of her.

All that day and all that night Cathadonia was riven by merciless tempests.

The great ocean to the west sang hauntingly. Maria Jill Ian had fever visions of gigantic creatures several times Bracero's size, but otherwise just like him, boiling the seas with their prodigious minds and feeding limitless power into the receptacle and conductor that Bracero had become.

A psychic umbilical from the seas fed the poor creature, kept him alive, channeled energy into his every brain cell.

And all through the sixth day and night the voices persisted.

The seventh day broke clear and cold. Ogre's Heart showed its wan, sickly crest on the eastern horizon and the lake surfaces twinkled with muted light.

Maria unlashed herself and slid down the tree to the wet ground. She slept. She awoke to find Bracero in her lap, the first time he had permitted her to touch him — although he had often come achingly close. His body was rubbery and frail. His eyes were narrow and strange. Nothing about him seemed familiar. Still, she stroked his dry flesh and spoke to him a string of soothing nonsense words.

Together they waited.

At last, far away to the west, she saw a rounded shape rising over the horizon, looming up as if to intercept Ogre's Heart on its afternoon descent. The shape, a planet, cleared Cathadonia's edge

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and floated up into the sky like a brown and crustily wrinkled balloon.

It was Earth.

She knew at once it was Earth. She knew despite the fact that its atmosphere had been heated up, boiled off, and ripped away in the colossal, psychokinetic furnace of Bracero's people's minds. It was a lifeless, battered shell that floated out there now, not an ocean upon it.

Maybe they had brought it to her in hopes that she would rest satisfied with the gift and leave off her assault on the great ocean. They had dislodged Earth from its orbit, hurled it into the continuum of probeships and nothingness, and drawn it through that surreal vacancy to Cathadonia.

Now, for the first time since the creation of its solar system, Cathadonia had a moon.

Bracero is dead. He brought me my planet out of love, I'm sure of it. How do I bear up under this guilt?

Tomorrow I walk west again....

Love or vengeance. Which of these prompted Bracero to carry out the will of his people? Maria Jill Ian felt sure it was love. But we, you and I, aware of more substantive factors than this poor Earth woman had at hand, you and I may reach a different conclusion.

The answer, of course, is implicit in the story. Perhaps I ought to stop. Imprudently, I choose to add a sort of epilogue. All stories have sequels, written or unwritten, and I don't want you going away from this one believing it solely a love story with a monstrously ironic conclusion. I'm interested in human as well as alien motivation, and you don't want to believe that all of humankind died as the result of an incomprehensible force, a force superior in kind and in quality to our own technological achievements.

Very well. It wasn't so.

Although Earth was still officially the "home" world of our species, men had not lived there in great numbers for several centuries. The entire planet had become a sanctuary, a preserve seeded back into wilderness, and perhaps only a thousand human beings lived there as wardens, keepers, physicians, gardeners, biologists, ecological experts. Men and women of good will.

All of them died, every one of them. Nearly twice as many human beings as (if you'll pardon the expression) squiddles who were slaughtered by the crewmen of the *Golden*.

It didn't take men long to discover what had happened to their world, the home of the primeval oceans in which we had

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spawned. The probeship *Nobel* returned from the Magellanic Clouds and found a double planet where there had once been only Cathadonia. They attempted radio contact with Fischelson and the Ians. Nothing. Well away from this puzzling twin system they hovered, mulling over ludicrous stratagems. After a time, they left.

In other vessels men came back.

They bombarded Cathadonia with nukes of every variety, concentrating on "The Sea of Stagnation." Then they swept the atmosphere clean of radiation and permitted men to go down to the surface.

Of course, they never found Maria Jill Ian, nor the apocryphal log from which you have just read.

How could they? Cathadonia now had tides — colossal, remorseless tides — that swept back and forth across her watery surface with cruel, eroding regularity. To find Maria would have required a miracle. But a legend grew up around her and the two men aboard her descentcraft, the legend you have just read, and almost everyone believed this legend to be true.

Worldshapers came.

In a hundred years they turned our runaway Earth into a paradise; restored to it an atmosphere, mountains, streams, lakes, greenery, everything but oceans; stocked it with every manner of beautiful and awesome beast from the colony worlds. Cathadonia and Earth, the most breathtaking double planet in the universe. When visitors began coming, hotels were built amid the landscaped gardens of our erstwhile spawning place, and people rose early in the morning to watch Ogre's Heart turn the seas of Cathadonia — across 300,000 kilometers of space — into mother-of-pearl mirrors.

Eventually, on Cathadonia, the downed descentcraft was recovered.

Men speculated. The legend surrounding Fischelson and the Ians took on a mystical quality.

This could not last.

Someone, some enterprising soul, developed the idea of retracing the route Maria Jill Ian had traversed during her abortive "odyssey" and of flying tourists over it in a skimmercraft piloted by a glib well-briefed guide. The idea caught on. Recorded voices now detailed every step of Maria and her Cathadonian sidekick.

"'*Men are hardy creatures,*'" the recordings mimicked in their never-varying commentary. "'*Men are the ultimate vermin, Maria, as indefatigable as cockroaches.*'"

Everyone aboard the skimmercrafts nodded sagely at the profundity of these observations.

No one ever asked for his money back.

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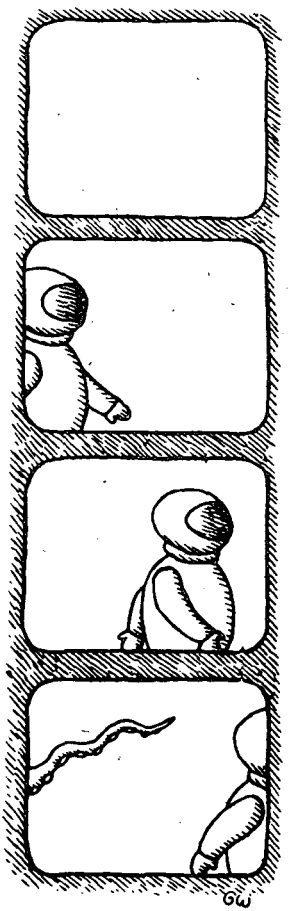
EARTHTREK

I think what I like about Gene Roddenberry's productions are their echoes of the Golden Age of s/f; there's certainly something of Captain Future in Captain Kirk's ancestry, last season's "Genesis II" had the quality of those galumphing pre-bomb, after-the-holocaust novels that were fun before they became all too likely, and visually, of course, they look like every pulp mag cover published (the ladies of Triskelion in "The Game Players of..." were classic Earle Bergey, for instance).

But as with literary s/f, something unfortunate happens when Significance is injected. Don't get me wrong; I have nothing against meaningful content (if I had to make a choice, I'd say that Olaf Stapledon was the greatest writer of science fiction). But there are ways and ways of doing it and, in a sense, the field lends itself too easily to allegorical and satirical variations on reality. My interest in "Startrek" started to wane when we began to get endless variations on Earth cultures (which also happened because they were cheaper in the wardrobe and set departments, I suspect), and Roddenberry's latest, *Planet Earth*, took the same wrongheaded direction, only worse.

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



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It is a sequel to the aforementioned "Genesis II"; a second pilot for a proposed series. Our hibernating astronaut hero is settled in in the post-holocaust future, and helping the good guys try to reestablish civilization, hopefully along more progressive lines. He and some confreres take the handy dandy underground shuttle system, which still works, to an unexplored bit of territory which is ruled by a rural matriarchy. I think you can see what we're in for...yup, lots of commentary on sexism.

The ladies in question keep their men in subjection by drugs, thus equalizing the question of sheer brute strength; what was revealed about this culture during the lumbering progress of the plot succeeded in being offensive to just about everybody, I would guess. Basically, the thesis is viable: that any group in control of any other group is A Bad Thing. But despite a lot of talk toward the end about everybody pulling together, the solution here seemed to be that the hero ply the worst of these harpies with wine and a good line and a kiss or two, and she eventually melts—he was saved from bedding her only by the attack of some mutant Awfuls, but the implication remained that a roll in the hay can subvert the worst of matriarchies, and somehow, I just don't think that's the answer.

On an entirely different level, this production suffered in comparison to the first by being recast. Alex Cord was convincing as the hero of "Genesis II" (that is, as convincing as any hero can be these days). Continuing the same role, John Saxon, whom I rather admire for having made the switch from handsome leading man to character actor in the '60s, just didn't have it. And as his potential romantic interest, Harper-Smythe, an actress whose name I can't remember did a charming bit of characterization in GII; here Janet Margolin took the role, and one can see why she made her first (and only) impression as a catatonic in "David and Lisa."

It seems that this will indeed become a series for next season. The idea has enormous potential; a fragmented world of scattered cultures all accessible by the still-extant tube system. I just hope it will stick to imaginative adventure and eschew the social significance.

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C.L. Grant's new story is an unusually inventive piece of work that concerns the conflict between one dreamer and several realists on a high school English faculty and extrapolates those differences into something quite strange and terrifying.

The Rest Is Silence

by C. L. GRANT

Beware of dreamers: *that would be my epitaph if I could have a grave to go to when I die. But all there is now is a rambling, shrinking house, and a fog that wisps away my words as I speak. I have committed suicide (unaware) and have been murdered for it (all too aware); but if I have to shift the unbearable blame for this madness elsewhere, it has to go to Julius Caesar, late of Rome and the Elizabethan stage. After all, if he hadn't gotten himself so famously killed, Shakespeare would have never written a play about it nor would I have had to teach it. Yet he did, and I did, so here we are. And now I know all too well just where that is.*

After the fact, events have a diabolical way of falling into place that makes a curse of hindsight and hell for the present. Case in point: a Wednesday in October and a perfectly ordinary English Department meeting. Chandler Jolliet, the commandingly tall chairman, was quietly and efficiently razoring our confidence in our collective abilities. Apparently a virgin member of our troupe had decided not to concentrate on *Julius Caesar's* examination of power, but rather on the in-depth characterization of the conspirators, Brutus in particular. God forbid that we should deviate from the chartered lanes of the courses of study, but this youngster, fresh from college with stars in his eyes, had taken it upon himself to do just that, and we were all suffering for it. Jolliet's sycophants and friends were murmuring and nodding; and the rest of us, who had endured this brand of tirade before, were daydreaming, planning our Christmas vacations and plotting assassinations of our own. And when the hour-and-a-half tantrum was over, we nodded our heads in sage

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obeisance and shuffled out, as slaves must have done before the overseer's whip. In the hall, however, the culprit, Marty Schubert, cornered me and Valerie Stern to press his case.

"I don't understand," he said. "What's so holy about *Caesar* that I can't talk about something new for a change? I'm not saying Jollie's way is better or worse, but for God's sake, what the hell does he have against me? What did I do that he hates me?"

"Not a thing," Val said, guiding him gently by the arm away from Jolliet's open office door. "It's just his way of breaking you in." She looked back at me and smiled. "Eddie's been through it. So have I. You just have to grin and bear it."

"Why?" he demanded as anguish and anger gathered in his features like thunderclouds.

"Because we need the jobs, Marty," I said, not liking the sound of my voice, so recently like his, so recently crushed. "There are too many teachers and not enough jobs. Val, me, and a few others, we've been around much too long to go hunting for other positions. Who'd hire us when they could have newcomers at half the salary? The only thing we can do is play the game, Sam. Play the game and hope he has a heart attack, or a lingering case of diarrhea."

Marty stared, not quite sure if I were serious. Finally he decided I wasn't and laughed. But his cheeks were still flushed and his eyes glinting, as if he'd been repeatedly slapped. We signed out in silence, and in the parking lot Val and I watched him slump to his car and drive slowly away. Val, her eyes hidden by uncut bangs as black as my mood, shook her head. "He's a smart kid, Eddie. It's a shame to see the old bastard do him in like that."

I could only shrug, and she accepted that as a sign of the times under which we lived. We parted, silently, and I drove home much faster than I'd intended, for there was nothing for me there. The apartment was still the hospital-white, bare-floored cell I'd resigned myself to when I finally realized there was no place else for me to go. I wasn't clever enough to quit and enter business, nor was I ambitious enough to climb out of the classroom into administration. Sometimes I entertained the spirit of Mr. Chips and envisioned thousands of ex-students tearfully waving good-bye at my retirement. A farce for all that: I could barely remember the names of kids I'd taught the year before, much less those I'd challenged in my virgin year.

It rained that night, if I recall correctly. My unlisted telephone

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continued collecting dust. The end of a perfect day. And the world kept spinning.

The following morning, however, with the sun barely risen, the telephone scared the hell out of me by working.

"Eddie?"

"Marty, that you?" I was still asleep. I must have been, or his actor's deep voice would have identified him immediately.

"Eddie, listen, I can't go back. Not after what he's done to me."

That woke me up. "Whoa, son, hang on a minute. Don't let that creep get to you like that."

"I'm sorry, Eddie, but I can't do it. I understand your position, really, and I'm not kidding, but I've been thinking it over. In fact, I haven't slept all night. I just can't go back and face him. Would you do me a favor and stop over on your way in? You can take my books and stuff in with you. My resignation too."

Since I was still rather foggy, all I did was mumble an agreement, take a shower and fix myself some instant breakfast. I made a quick call to the school, telling the secretary I might be a little late, car trouble, and hung up before she could get too nosy. On the way to Marty's rented duplex, I kept the window rolled down to wake me up. I was worried. Marty was one of the brightest, most dedicated teachers I had known, and somehow I had to keep him with us. If for no other reason than he actually liked the kids he worked with, and they, in turn, held him in enormous respect.

He opened his front door immediately when I knocked. He was dressed for work, but unshaven, and his breath as he welcomed me told me what he'd been thinking with. He was sober, though, and solemnly waved me to a chair.

"Marty, listen —"

"I know, I know, Ed. I'm cutting my career out from under me, right? Nobody's going to hire a teacher who quit before Christmas for reasons like mine, right? You want me to last out the year, find another school and then tell him to shove it. Right?"

All I could do was nod, and he laughed at my confusion and the wind spilling from my best noble speech. To my surprise, he nodded too.

"Well, you are right. I've been sitting here watching the sun and the clock, and I've decided to do just that. I'm going to smile if it kills me, then do what I want when he's not looking. Maybe," he added, grinning, "I can help drive him to that early retirement you guys are always talking about."

"I wish you all the luck in the world," I said, returning the grin,

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though more relieved that he was still with us than responding to his humor.

"But listen, Eddie," he said. "I'll tell you one thing: I'm not going to take that kind of abuse in public again. And neither is anyone else." And for a frightening moment, his anger returned.

"Sure thing. Whatever you say, Marty," I said, standing quickly. "Just play it safe for a while, will you? See which way the wind blows. I doubt that Jollie's after your hide. He just doesn't like original thinkers, you know what I mean?"

"I think we'd better get going, don't you? The education of our nation's children lies perilously within our hands."

"Yea, and verily," I said. "Onward. I'll meet you there. I think you'd better shave."

"Brutus was right, though," Marty said as he held open the door for me. "We all stand against the spirit of Caesar, but unfortunately, the spirit doesn't bleed."

"Come again?" But the door was shut before I could get an answer. And I didn't remember his remark until after Thanksgiving, when my own classes were destroying Shakespeare's poetry. When the lines Marty had paraphrased came up in the discussion, I became unaccountably nervous, and I kept seeing Jollie draped in a toga. When I passed the fantasy on to those I could trust not to run immediately to the boss, they laughed, and soon enough, Jolliet became Caesar, and Marty was an instant celebrity for inspiring the analogy.

What a blow it was, then, when we received a party invitation from the old man.

-2-

I was sitting in my classroom, commiserating with Val over an impossible malcontent who was disrupting her classes, when our department bird watcher and sapling look-alike, Wendy Buchwall, scurried in waving a pink slip of paper. "You're not going to believe this," she said, "but we've been invited to a costume ball."

"You're right," I said. "I don't believe it. Who's passing that insane idea around. It sounds like Guidance is on a new kick."

"No, him," she said, holding the paper in front of my glasses just long enough for me to make out Jolliet's pompous scrawl.

"Him?"

"The Man, Val."

"You're kidding. Cut it out. It isn't funny."

Wendy, obviously still unbelieving herself, handed her the invitation, and we sat for a quiet moment wondering if we'd stumbled into an alternate universe that delighted in perversity.

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"It figures," Val said finally. "A Shakespearean ball, yet."

"That's ridiculous," I said when Wendy handed the paper to me. I read it, blinked and hoped it would go away. "Hey, this thing is on the Friday over Christmas vacation. Brother, he sure knows how to ruin a holiday."

Wendy perched on the edge of my desk and shook her head. "There is absolutely no way I am going to drag my husband to such a farce. He'll divorce me. He'll have good reason."

"Dream on," Val said. "Unfortunately, I don't see how you can gracefully get out of it. Unless you're dying."

"Says who?"

"Says tenure, dear. We three unholies are bucking for that lovely piece of security. We're stuck. And," she added as Wendy turned to her, "if I remember correctly, we all advised Marty to play the game. What's he going to think of us if we don't go along? We, honey, are on the same team."

Wendy stuck out her tongue and pouted, kicking her heels against the metal side of my desk until I was more than tempted to dump her onto the floor. But Val, as usual, was right. The three of us had drifted into this valley high school at the same time, each running from a city faculty horrific in its brutality. All of us had at least ten years behind us, and it was a wonder that we were hired at all. Now we were facing the final step — no tenure this time and it was back to housekeeping for Wendy, a library for Val, and God only knew what for me. It was times like this that made me want to strangle the wag who said, "Them's that can't, teach."

I began doodling on the desk blotter. A noose first. When I drew in a stick man, I couldn't decide who it was.

"I don't want to go," Wendy near whispered, sadly now.

"No choice," Val said. "No goddamned choice."

"It's the principle of the thing," I said, suddenly angry. "I don't know why the hell we let that man push us around like this. Christ, we're like children as far as he's concerned."

"Principle," said Val in her maddeningly calm way, "does not put bread on the table."

And silence. I remembered when I had been as idealistic as Marty Schubert, and mourned myself those days. I began to see just why he had reasons for hating me, and I wondered if, in fact, he had. Right then, it suddenly mattered very much. Not only did I care that he understood what I was doing and why I didn't fight the world as he did, I was also a little frightened. For the last two weeks,

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pranksters of a most unfunny lot had been dumping mutilated fowl on our doorsteps. Mine (two barn owls) were missing their hearts, Wendy's and Val's their entrails. Jolliet, too, had been similarly victimized, and although we had been passing the incidents off on some kid who was too eager to delve into the literal meanings of the occult in Shakespeare's more gruesome moments, I couldn't help thinking of Marty, his rage, and those tears in his eyes.

"My God," I finally shouted, getting out of my chair and tossing the pencil into the wastebasket. "Whose damnable idea was this in the first place?"

"Mine."

I looked up and Marty came in, hands clasped in front of him like a marching priest. Wendy jumped off the desk and punched him twice on the arm, hard. He laughed and ducked playfully away from her further attack. Val threw an eraser at him, and I stalked around until I slumped against the chalkboard and glared at him. "Traitor," I said.

Marty smiled innocently. "I thought you wanted me to go along with him."

"Oh, brother," I said. "That was the general idea, yes, but did you have to go for assistant god? A Shakespearean ball? Jesus, Marty, couldn't you have done better?"

He glanced around at the three of us, shrugged and appropriated my chair. Immediately he sat, his feet were crossed on the desk's top, scattering several papers. "But Willy is his favorite man. All I did was kind of ease him around until he fell into it himself. He, uh, really didn't care for it at first. It took a lot of talking." He smiled again, but this time there was no mirth, and I knew he was lying. Jolliet would have died before going through a year, a goddamned day with Lear, Hamlet and all the rest of the bloody crew. Marty, for his own reasons, knew exactly what he was doing. I didn't know if the women caught on, but I didn't like it and abruptly lost the will to banter any more. The game had turned sour; I wanted to spit.

"I wish you hadn't done it," I said.

Marty shrugged his indifference to my opinion.

Val, meanwhile, was mimicking an ultrasensuous walk up and down an aisle, tossing kisses to the pale green walls. "I'm not ashamed to say that Cleopatra would suit me just fine."

"You'll make an asp of yourself," I said.

"You'll go to hell for that," she said and blew me a kiss, a real one, and I couldn't help but admit to myself that she could easily slay my bachelorhood dragon.

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"Too obvious," Wendy said, off on a track of her own. "Why not beat the bastard at his own game and go as the conspirators? Who knows, maybe the Ides of March'll come early this season."

"That's the spirit," Marty said, abandoning my chair and heading for the door, a little too quickly. "I might be Marc Antony."

"But he was a double-crosser," Wendy said.

"Yeah," he answered. "How about that?"

After he'd gone, I picked up a piece of chalk and began scribbling what I could remember of the "Friends, Romans, countrymen" speech on the blackboard. It helped me not to think.

A few minutes later, Val picked up her coat and purse and took Wendy by the arm. "Come on, bird girl," she said. "Let's hit the road. Eddie, if all you've got is your famous TV dinners, drop around. I'll see what the larder has hidden from payday."

I stopped writing and nodded without committing myself. Then I listened to their heels tracing a unison beat down the hall. Outside my window I could hear a snowball fight. From the back of the school came the muffled shouts of an afternoon basketball game, the cadence pounding of feet responding to a cheer. "I still don't like it," I said to the empty chairs.

-3-

The Christmas break arrived none too soon for my rapidly decaying nerves. Though there had been no repetition of the practical jokes that had stained my doorstep, Marty's increasingly foul temper had strained our not-too-deep friendship. More and more he sniped at me for surrendering my ideals, would then immediately laugh as if to salve the wounds he knew he was inflicting. And there was fury in the dust he raised when he left school each night.

Since I was without a family, and Val had headed for an aunt's, I treated myself, on Christmas Day, to a gluttonous delight at a nearby restaurant that deserved a better fate than being buried in the hills. The more I ordered, the better the service was; and when the meal finally ended, I was actually laughing with the waitress. It was a good, rare feeling, and I drove home slowly in order to preserve it. There had been a snowfall two days before, and the lawns and fields had not yet been all trampled by children and snowmobiles. The snow had hardened, filmed with thin ice and contoured smooth like unbroken clouds. I grinned; I whistled; and when the telephone rang just as I was hanging up my overcoat, I even said "hello" instead of the usual "yeah?"

"Marty here, Ed. I just wanted

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to wish you a merry, and all that. Also, I have a friendly reminder of this Friday's gay festivities."

The measure of my good will weathered even this miserable reminder of that costume affair. "Bless you, Tiny Tim," I said. "Having a good day?"

"So-so. I'm at my, uh, uncle's place now. Where the party's going to be, you know? Strange old guy, but he's teaching me a few things, and I'll put up with anything for a free meal. Can't complain. You?"

"Just great, just great. But as long as you brought it up, what are you going as?"

"Huh?"

"Oh, come on. The extravaganza, my boy. What ingenious rig have you devised, or is it a secret?"

"Oh, that. Nothing special. Since everyone seems on a Caesar kick —"

"I wonder why," I muttered.

"— I thought I would just grab a sheet and go as the soothsayer."

He laughed, but somehow I failed to see the joke. For all the scheming he had done, I thought the least he'd go as was the Poet himself. A soothsayer just didn't seem to fit the occasion. I told him I was thinking of Macbeth, but he didn't seem to care. As soon as he learned I was still going, he chatted meaninglessly for a while, then rang off, leaving me with an absolutely preposterous image of him wandering the halls of this uncle's house trailing a permanent-press sheet beneath Japanese sandals and whispering "Beware the Ides of January" into everyone's ears. The image, unbidden, was immediately replaced with one equally unwelcome: of a figure in immaculate white posturing on a rounded dais while all the English Department sprawled at his cloven feet and drank hemlock laced with sulfur. The man's face was in clouds, and I couldn't tell if it were Marty or Jolliet. I held the picture as long as I could, working to eliminate its inexplicably obscene horror by trying to think of an appropriate theme for it. But the only song I could come up with was "After the Ball," in dirge time.

For the rest of the day I had the feeling that, while some entertained the ghost of Christmas Future, I was hosting the Scrooge of Hellsmas Past.

Quickly I grabbed a bottle from my private, not-very-select stock and sloshed out three quarters of a glass, most of which I finished before I'd lost my nerve. At the same time, I delved into my puny knowledge of Freud and attempted to fashion an explanation for the vision, if vision it were; but I was interrupted, gratefully, by the telephone. This time it was Wendy, slightly drunk and wishing slurred season's greetings for nearly five

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minutes before apologizing and hanging up. I hadn't even had the chance to say hello.

I had dreams after that, better forgotten, and finally came the night, the Friday evening when not even the Second Coming would have cheered me up. Feeling as ridiculous as I ever had, I climbed into my car, decked out in the closest approximation of Shakespearean Italian the local theatrical costumer could dredge up. If anyone asked, I would be Romeo, or Petruchio, or perhaps even Iago; at any rate, no one was going to get the same answer twice, and I didn't really care. For the moment all I worried about was being stopped by a local policeman and having to explain, while taking a drunkometer test, why I was dressed in tights, a scarf and a red-plumed hat.

It wasn't until I reached the house and was getting out of the car that I saw the still-red heart of a bird lying on the seat next to me. I gagged, tossed it away and leaned against the car hood, trying hard to breathe. I told myself to turn right around and go on home. But I spotted Val's car and decided I'd better stick around, although I wasn't sure why.

Originally, the house had been a development ranch which successive owners had bastardized by splicing on additions so often that it sprawled idiotically over a full acre, if not more. I'd passed it often and had never known who'd lived there, but I wasn't surprised to learn that it was Marty's uncle's. Somehow it seemed to fit. At least, however, he'd tried to even things off a bit by enclosing two inner courtyards, one behind the other, with a roof of glass, thus providing his guests with green grass and roof-high shrubbery to hide in while the snow fell and turned the sky white. This I discovered not two minutes after I'd rung the doorbell and had been admitted to a living-room-cum-foyer by a woman I didn't recognize and who apparently didn't know that harem girls seldom appeared at the Globe. She was, however, friendly, and immediately guided me to the first garden, where most of my fellow sufferers were rapidly draining the first of seemingly endless punch bowls.

Val, true to her threat, was Cleopatra, so much so that I began at once to make plans for later. Wendy and her husband struggled valiantly, and lost, as Bottom and Titania. The others were dressed as I was or were tripping over homemade togas. The masks we wore seemed less to hide than scream our identities, and what laughter there was seemed false.

I squirmed and was uncomfortable, and welcomed Val's offering of a drink with a smile and a kiss

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just this side of rape. She grinned.

"Down, whoever you are. We've only just begun to play."

"But Madame Egypt," I protested, sitting gingerly on a plaster, gingerly because the tights I was wearing were that and more. "This is too much. What are we supposed to do, sit around and drink all night? For that I could have gone to a bar."

Val coiled beside me, hugging my arm, and we watched as the newcomers were ushered in, grabbed by Wendy and hustled away with filled glasses before we could identify them. I blinked and shook my head. "I didn't know we had this many in the department."

She laughed, making quite sure I noticed she was not about to let go of my arm. "You should see the back patio. Courtyard. Whatever. I guess Marty told Jollie he could have anyone he wanted. It's amazing. I didn't think he knew that many people."

"Speaking of which, where is mine host? It'd be just like him not to come."

"Oh, he's around. He looks like a drip-dry bed with all his sheets. But Eddie, his beard, his face...it looks too real." I frowned and was about to get an elaboration when Wendy staggered over and punched me viciously on the arm. For the first time in months I was in no mood for her imitation heavyweight, and I think I would have hit her back if her husband, Dan, hadn't followed her over. I shook his hand without standing as we passed the usual acquaintances-who-don't-really-know-each-other's greetings.

"Where is the creep?" he growled; and I could see, even with his ass's head, that he wasn't kidding. I looked to Wendy who smiled dryly and waved a hand toward the roof. "I told him about Jollie and Marty. And us."

"Bastard," Dan muttered belligerently. "Men like him shouldn't be allowed to work."

"Smart guy," I said to his wife, but she wasn't listening, staring instead at the glass over our head.

The snow, which had started nearly an hour before I'd left, was powder, and a slight wind was skating it across the glass in swirls and nebulae, which made me think of watching herds of antelope stampeding before a pursuing helicopter. I sensed Val watching me, and I grinned and said without looking at her, "Beautiful. Stare at it long enough and you'll forget where you are." There were scratches in the glass, and snow caught and held there, then quickly escaped to be replaced and replaced again. Suddenly Val tugged at my arm. I looked down, with the odd feeling that I was actually looking up, and then saw

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Marty enter from the glass-walled breezeway that divided the two courtyards. I was going to laugh at the preposterous sight, but something about the ancient way he walked stopped me. He nodded at each guest, but passed them as if they were statuary, stalking rather than winding his way toward us. When he arrived, however, he was smiling, his greyed head bobbing as he looked quickly around.

"Beware —"

"— the Ides of January," I interrupted, and was surprised at the glare he shot at me.

"How'd you know I was going to say that," he said, his voice matching his made-up age.

I shrugged. "ESP. Besides, it suits you."

The glare shifted reluctantly to a frown, to a bland smile. "Oh, well, nobody was laughing anyway. How do you like the ball?"

"Where's the music and dancing?" Val wanted to know. "How can you have a ball without an orchestra, or even a radio? I'm disappointed in you, Marty boy, really I am."

Marty said nothing. He only resumed his bobbing. "Don't worry. Everything's all right. All these people are for show anyway. They'll be gone soon, and then the real party begins. By the way, have you seen our fearless leader?"

We shook our heads, and he grinned, yellow and brown-black.

"Caesar," he said without elaboration.

"Why not?" Val said.

"That," I said, "is the most disgusting thing I've ever heard. The man can't be serious, he just can't be. And before I forget, old man, I found a bird's heart in my car tonight. I don't suppose you know anything about it."

"So did I," Val said. "Wendy too." She tried smiling, but I saw the way she swallowed convulsively. Fully angry now, I turned back to Marty, but he stopped me with a feeble wave.

"Don't worry about it. Bad joke. Like Jollie's costume."

I wanted to pursue that "bad joke" of his, certain now that he was the one who'd been deviling us, but Val must have known what I was thinking because she placed a gentle finger on my lips and mouthed "Caesar." "Him? What about him? You know, if you tell me he's wearing a plastic laurel wreath, I'll vomit, if you'll pardon the vulgarity."

"No," Marty said. "It's real. He said it took him two hours to get it right. He didn't want to use any string. Authenticity, he said."

I had a comment, several of them, but suddenly there was a crackling, ripping flash of lightning, followed hard by a deafening explosion of thunder. The entire

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house quieted, and a couple of women shrieked. Only a few times before had I ever witnessed such a phenomenon, and each time, the feeling of watching snow falling while thunder and lightning played out of season was as close to staring dead on into an open grave as I'd like to get. There was an encore as eerie as the first, but this served to shatter the silence and everyone began talking at once, the noise rapidly regaining its former level until, without realizing it, I found myself listening to some canned music. Quite accidentally, I discovered the speakers hidden within the huge, junglelike thickets of forsythia that lined the garden's perimeter and served to screen most of the house from those in the center. Curious it was, and impulsively, I grabbed Val's hand.

"Come on," I said. "There's something I want to see."

"Hey, wait a minute," Marty said. "Don't you want to see Jollie?"

"No, thanks," I said. "that can wait, if you don't mind."

Marty frowned until he appeared to make a decision. "Oh, well, you can see him later, I guess. It won't make any difference. Where are you going?"

I pointed. "The other courtyard."

"Oh. Well, look, try not to wander around the house, okay? Even with a single floor, all those additions make it too easy to get lost." He laughed. "I ought to know. I came through the back door once, and it took me two hours to get to the front. You know, when I told my uncle about this party, I thought he —"

"Marty," I said, not altogether politely, "you have other guests. Val and I'll talk to you later on, after you've done the host bit. I'm sure you wouldn't want to offend anyone."

"Now what was that supposed to mean?" I could see it then, the reason why he looked so old, weighted, weary — the rage was still there, and no longer merely directed at Jolliet. The old saying "If looks could kill" came disturbingly to mind, and I involuntarily stepped back.

"I didn't mean anything." I said. "Forget it. Come on, Val." And once into the corridor, I pulled her close to me, felt her shivering. "Sorry, love, but I have a feeling I'm not exactly in the spirit of things."

"Relax, Eddie," she said as I guided her into the back garden. "I think I'm going to develop a splitting headache in a few minutes. In fact, as soon as Jollie sees us and we smile a little."

"I have this odd feeling I'm going to have to be chivalrous. Coincidence."

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We laughed quietly as we stepped onto the grass and looked around. Except for a slightly denser crowd, there seemed to be no difference between the two party areas. Then I noticed the red and purple streamers, and the red balloons dangling from string taped to the glass roof. If the idea was to make the room more festive, it failed miserably. All it did was make a pleasant garden look tawdry.

"Notice something?" I asked.

"What?"

"Except for spaces cleared for doors, you can't see into the house from here. And vice versa, I imagine. I wonder why someone would bother to make a place like this if you couldn't see it unless you were in it?"

Val stepped in front of me then, crossing her arms over her barely covered chest. "Why don't you really relax a little, Ed? Try to enjoy. Worry about something else besides the architecture. Like my dry throat, for instance."

I stared dumbly for a moment. And I wondered. None of this — the bizarre party, the birds' hearts and entrails, the people who now seemed to be leaving — none of it affected her. As I led her to the refreshment table, I began to think I was far too susceptible to atmosphere, especially when it seemed to be of my own creation.

"You're so cheerful," Val said suddenly. "I don't think I can stand it."

"Try," I said, nearly choking on a swallow of cheap whiskey. "And if you want entertainment, turn around and blink rapidly before it goes away." As she did, I added, "Jesus Christ, I never thought I'd live to see the day."

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Both of us indulged for a moment in the cinematic cliche of allowing our mouths to drop open. Entering the garden through a door in the back was Jolliet, all six-plus feet of him so elegantly swathed in a toga laced with purple that he actually commanded a slight bow. His longish brown hair was combed straight back and held by a laurel wreath twined with some kind of gold metallic thread. Big in a suit, he was huge in that costume, and no one, least of all myself, laughed. For some reason, we didn't dare.

"My God," Val said weakly. "That's spooky."

"It's downright unnatural," I said sourly. I had expected to find the man a supreme source for derision, and he had double-crossed me. I became furious and poured myself another drink while Val waved and sent him striding regally toward us. The still-thinning crowd parted wordlessly, and when he stood before us, he

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took Val's hand and bowed over it, his lips barely brushing her skin.

"Caesar," she said, easing her voice up from her throat in a way I'd never heard before.

"My dearest Cleo," he said, ignoring me, but not her cleavage. "Egypt misses you, I've no doubt. The serendipity of your countenance entices me. Would you care to join me in a devilish concoction I invented myself?"

Val laughed and gently disengaged her hand while holding up her still-full glass with the other. "I have one, thanks. Romeo, here, makes a good servant."

"Thanks," I said, extending my hand to my boss, who barely touched it.

"Grand celebration, isn't it, Eddie? I really believe the old man would have been delighted to be here."

The "old man" was Shakespeare. The way Jolliet talked about him, I've often thought they were roommates in boarding school.

"Marty's done a fine job," I admitted. "And if you don't mind me asking, where in God's name did you get that costume? You could have been born in it."

"I've often wished I had, Eddie."

"Surely not as Caesar," Val said. "Your life would have been shortened considerably."

Jolliet smiled wickedly. "Not mine."

All I could say was, "Oh." Then, "Did you ever find out who's been playing those jokes?"

Immediately he stiffened. "I'm sorry, Ed, but I'm afraid I cannot call that a joke, especially when I discovered the severed head of an owl in my automobile this evening. No, not a joke. Some misbegotten prankster, perhaps. More likely someone deathly afraid of facing me himself, and therefore he uses less direct, less committed means of expressing his displeasure. You, possibly?"

"Not me," I said, laughing. "That's too original for me."

"Hardly original. Ed. The disemboweled chicken, the owls, are straight out of the so-called occult literature available in any shoddy paperback. The child obviously has problems and has decided to use me as a focus of his aberration."

"That so," I muttered into my glass, not bothering to note that the "old man" himself was not above employing the so-called occult. The conversation, continuing with Val while I sulked, might have been funny to someone unused to his instant analyses, but having been subjected to them several times myself, I was definitely not amused. And during a pause, I said, "How do you figure it's a kid? One of your students?"

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He waved an arm and a yard of cloth, gathering both Val and me into a circle of apparent great confidence. "My students? Absolutely not, Eddie. They know better. I've taught them better. They all have come to realize the value of reason, and this is hardly the act of a reasonable man. No, I rather think it's the result of an overimaginative mind that somehow feels I've wronged it. As much as I dislike those things, however, I must admit I'm intrigued. I can't wait for the next manifestation."

"Oh?" I said. "Very interesting, really. I'll hope you let us know what happens next. I really hadn't looked at it your way before."

Jolliet nodded, smiling too much like a shark to please me. "Of course I will. Glad to see your interest. We should talk about this sometime. I'd like to hear what you think about these occult things. *Rosemary's Baby,* and such."

"Great," I said. "It's a date."

Someone called his name, then, and when he looked up, it was Marty, beckoning from the doorway. "Ah, excuse me, Eddie, Val, Marty has a surprise for me. A contest or something, I imagine. I'll talk to you later."

When he disappeared through the rear door, Val snatched away my empty glass and slammed it onto the table. "I hope you'll let us know what happens next," she mimicked. "I really hadn't seen it that way. Oh, brother, Eddie," And she rolled her eyes skyward.

Doing my best to imitate her slinking walk, I sidled up to her and grabbed her hand. "Oh, Caesar, baby," I said as huskily as I could. "Oh, Caesar, darling."

We stared at each other for a long second, and we didn't laugh.

The music grew, then, as did the voices, the laughter and not a few high-pitched shrieks. People were moving as if in a quiet panic from garden to garden. I looked for Wendy and Dan and saw only sequined masks and faces like raccoons. I found myself staring at mouths, since eyes were forbidden to me, and their grotesque writhings made me dizzy. I started to curse the whiskey and looked feebly around for a chair. The room had become perceptibly colder, the snow fell more heavily and seemed now to be freezing on the glass roof despite the warmth beneath. I shook off an impression that the house was beginning to move, ignored another ghostly display of thunder, and watched as the people began to leave, with none replacing them. Val, unaware of my gathering nightmare, hugged my arm and whispered something about Wendy and Dan. I nodded mutely and, when she left, renewed my friendship with Miniver Cheevy, cursing the fates and drinking.

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Through a slowly descending curtain, then, I lost vision of the rest of the evening. I wandered. I drank. I shook off a woman in a harem costume who wanted to see what my codpiece was hiding. I tried to vomit, and couldn't.

I do remember standing at a window and watching the snow fall.

I do remember standing by a speaker and listening to muted trombones.

And when next I opened my eyes and could see without falling, I was in a bed in a hideously dark-blue bedroom. A single light burned on a wrought-iron night table. I struggled to sit up, then waited for dizziness to pass. There was a constant pounding at the back of my head, and my mouth was dry to rasping.

And still the house was silent.

In a foolish moment, I searched the bed for my hat, realized what I was doing and laughed, stopping immediately when my throat burned.

Carefully, I pushed myself off the bed onto my feet and, using the walls for support until I was sure I wouldn't fall, I made my way to a dimly lighted hallway. Ruefully remembering Marty's warning about too much unguided wandering, I left the door open and walked to the nearest corner. I could hear snatches of mournful music, and I tried to locate its direction. When it became obvious I was losing it, I headed back the other way, staring without seeing the paintings on the dark-papered walls. None of them were striking enough to recall individually, except for their color: night. I cannot even now remember seeing one brush-stroked sun or noon-drenched meadow. I'm sure there were no people, no animals, no houses. Just...night.

I've since tried to locate that hallway again to verify these vague impressions. But I'm unable to.

Maybe later.

But I doubt it.

And then, quite by accident, I found a corridor I knew led to the gardens. Immediately I began to hurry, uneasily imagining some humiliating scene when Marty and Jolliet discovered I'd missed a fair portion of the party. It was all I needed to end a perfect evening.

But the gardens were empty. the tables, refreshments, folding chairs gone. The balloons were broken, the streamers shredded and hanging loosely. I called out for Val, half expecting my voice to echo. Then I called for Marty. Wendy. Even Dan. But when there was no response, I went into the front room where I'd met the harem girl. It was a small room, heavily paneled in walnut with an ugly moose's head perched over the front window. After a quick look around, I opened the door,

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shuddered at the shock of the cold and looked out. There was snow yet, and an oddly gathering fog. I could see, just this side of that wall-like mist, a couple of cars, including my own, still in the drive; so at least I wasn't alone. Under the circumstances, that was the greatest comfort I'd known in ages.

But when Marty snuck up behind me and whispered, "Beware the Ides of winter," I immediately lost everything I'd drunk onto the front stoop. Marty became solicitous at once and helped me back into the house.

"Now that was a stupid thing to do," I snapped, yanking my arm from his grip. "What the hell are you trying to do?"

"Shut up," he said, glaring. "We're waiting for you in the back garden."

"Oh, now wait a minute," I said, one hand to the wall to aid my abruptly unco-operative legs. "As soon as I can, I'm leaving, fella. This bullshit has gone on long enough."

Marty only stood there. I shook my head in a vain effort to clear it, then rubbed my face vigorously.

"If Val is still here," I said, "tell her to come out if she still needs a ride."

Marty shook his head. "The back garden. Come on, Eddie, you're holding up the works."

"What the hell are you babbling about?" I demanded, but he had already turned to leave. At the door he switched off the lights and looked back at me. Right then I was tempted to leave, even without my coat, but curiosity more than his heavy-handed manner made me follow him.

Through the first, still-empty garden. And the second.

"All right, all right, Mr. Barrymore, where is everyone?"

"I said the back garden," Marty said without turning around. "The back garden."

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I was too frustrated and confused to be apprehensive about the way Marty spoke to me, and I had to hurry to catch up with him as he made a sharp left through the rear exit and strode rapidly along a corridor that felt as if it had been carpeted in velvet. Another turn, and yet another before we stood in front of a glass wall streaked with dust and through which I could see what at first I refused to believe.

Here the house was two stories high, and in the courtyard framed by walls of stone were Val, Wendy and Dan, Jolliet and a man I'd never seen before. They were sitting on the sparse grass, but far from comfortably. As soon as Val spotted me, she ran into my arms before I realized they were open to receive her. Dan was dazed, his

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plaster ass's head broken on the ground beside him, his wife huddled in the protection of his arm.

And Jollie. I saw then that he wasn't sitting at all. He was propped up against a white stone bench, and there was more than purple on his toga. There was blood, drying like rust, pooling at his twisted legs. In his left hand he clutched the laurel wreath.

Before reason returned and all the scene's implications penetrated my own daze, I said, "I'm ashamed of you, Marty. That's hardly original."

Val, not understanding, gave a cry like a struck bird and backed away to stare at me, horrified. And while she did, I admitted to myself that I wasn't sorry. That he was dead, it grieved me because he was human and deserved better, but because he was Jolliet, I felt nothing but morbid curiosity.

Marty, meanwhile, had come around to face me, grinning. Beneath the beard his teeth seemed yellow-aged, and his eyes only echoed his grin. That look, more than anything else, snapped me awake, and I turned away to find a telephone. Marty snapped something I didn't quite catch, and the old man placed himself in front of the door. He was shorter than I, and easily forty years beyond me, but I checked myself and stared at him. Val, who had slumped wearily to the ground where she'd been standing, said, "That's the uncle, Eddie."

I nodded; he nodded back. And suddenly I began to laugh. Ludicrous: a murdered man, five teachers and an eccentric. And still I laughed. The hero's image I'd had of myself in fantasies that had lifted me from my more than prosaic life shattered like a twisted mirror with all the pieces shredding my eyes. I turned back to Marty, gagging now at the sight of Jollie's blood. He gestured and I sat, heavily. Val crawled slowly over to me, and we huddled, reflections of Wendy and Dan. I think I said "It's going to be all right" a few times, but neither Val nor I were listening or believing. One of us was shivering.

At last Marty seemed to tire of watching us and dragged a folding chair from behind a bush. The old man stayed where he was.

"You're going to die, you know," Marty said. "But not like that," and he nodded toward Jollie's body. "It's not the way you want to, is it? Do you like uncle's place, by the way? He used to be an illusionist; that's why the house seems bigger than it really is. He doesn't talk; so don't ask him any questions. The snow's coming down a bit more than earlier. Bad driving, not that you'll care."

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"Okay, pal," I said, tired of his rambling. "Just get to the point and stop this...this...whatever."

"Why, Eddie, you're frightened."

"No kidding."

At that moment, Dan came out of his stupor, and Wendy began crying. When Marty saw it, he waved a hand at his uncle, who hurried crablike to the Buchwalls and stood over them. Dan scowled, Wendy tried to crawl behind him, but the old man only looked until Dan eased himself to his feet and pulled Wendy up beside him. The former illusionist must have also been a mesmerist because they didn't speak, didn't see us, only followed the old man out of the garden.

"Where are they going?" Val asked, straightening and pulling out of my arms.

"To hell," Marty said flatly.

"And what are you, an angel?" I said.

He laughed. "Oh, my God, no. Is that what you're thinking? That this is the end of the world and I'm Gabriel in drag? Oh, Christ, Eddie, no wonder you've never gotten anywhere."

"Then where are they going?" Val repeated, her matter-of-fact tone the only sane thing in the world at the time.

"Nowhere," Marty said. "Nowhere at all." And he grinned, and that grin was rapidly fraying my nerves, or what was left of them.

"So what do we do now?"

"Wait."

That did it. His damnable calm and refusal to let us in on his cosmic plans infuriated me to the edge and over. I jumped to my feet before he could raise a hand to stop me. Head down, I struck him dead on the chest, my hands scrabbling for his neck. We fell off the chair and were separated when the ground struck us. Quickly I got to my feet, but not soon enough. Marty was waiting, swinging. There was no pain at first, nor did some magical part of my brain tell me I didn't know how to fight. I just stood there, trying to hit him while he pounded me to my knees. When sensation came, tears came and I fell to my side, sobbing, aching and utterly humiliated. There was salt in my mouth and one eye was closing. Val cradled my head and murmured nothings until my agony extended beyond the physical. I pressed my face into her breasts and continued to sob.

"You all played the game, you see," I could hear Marty saying, his disgust no longer hiding. "Too afraid to be even the slightest bit idealistic outside your own private ravings. You rationalized your powerlessness against a single man until you actually believed it. You convinced yourselves that you could

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do nothing but teach, and marked that damned school as the ends of your lines. Tell me something, Eddie: how many new teachers have you wiped out in the past three years? And how many at the school before that? And the one before that? How many teachers have you murdered?"

"Go to hell," Val said. "And leave him alone."

"Oh, I intend to do just that, Miss Stern."

"All right, then, you've made your point, little man. Now how about letting us go?"

"I'll think about it."

"What's to think about? You've murdered a man, and I doubt you'll get away with it. You've destroyed Eddie here, and you've made me harder than I thought I could be. What more do you want?"

Marty righted his chair and sat, crossing his arms over his chest while I rolled over and pushed myself up. I knew I was hurt, but whatever pain there was had dulled to a permanent, background throbbing easy to ignore. And while he was busy tormenting Val, I finally realized what had happened, what was going to happen, and I knew I wasn't man enough to fight it, or even explain it to Val. She was right. I was finished.

Marty, the soothsayer, had taken to himself the standard of the dreamers against the realities of the world. He had ranted more than we had, raged and railed until he had literally accumulated for himself a massive vortex of powered righteous indignation. Gully Jimson, Don Quixote and every dream of perfection and transformation twisted around him until he could, finally, strike back. Once. That was all he needed. And he paid, dearly.

"That man," I finally said, not stronger but more sure. "Nickels to dimes he's not your uncle."

Val looked quizzically at me; Marty smiled, genuine respect and grateful humor revived in his eyes.

"You know," he said, and I nodded. "This battle is very tiring, you see. He tried it when he was twenty-six. You'd never believe it, but he's thirty-four now. I met him last summer and thought he was crazy until he explained how it could be done and showed me a newspaper clipping of an unsolved disappearance. When that department meeting was over, I knew I could do it but was undecided until just before you came over to pick up my resignation. I wasn't mad enough until I saw you. He won't live much longer, though. It takes a lot out of you."

"Then why bother?"

"Because sooner or later —"

"What are you two talking about?" Val demanded.

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She was frightened now, her shell pierced and peeling. Marty reached for her shoulder to comfort her, but she twisted away, shuddering.

"Sooner or later what?" I pursued. "All us cynics and realists will be gone, and the world will become a better place to live? The dreamers will march, the sunrise will come, and all God's children will be free at last to roam among the flowers?" I trembled, wanting to yell, feeling more like weeping. "When this is over, you'll be as aged as your friend, and just as useless. Don't you think you'll do more good by inculcating your students than destroying your so-called enemies?"

"What enemies?" Val said. "Eddie, this isn't funny at all. Please help me."

I reached out and took her hand, softly, and turned back to Marty. "I'm sorry to say there are more of us than there are of you."

"Bastard," he said.

At that, Val leapt to her feet, her face streaked and shining. She was naked now, and her exposure belied the clothes that covered her. "I want to go home, and damn both of you," she said. "Marty, damn you, let me out of here."

Marty looked at me, then behind me. The old-young man shuffled in, stood silently by the door while I wondered how many he had banished in his pitiful moment of glory.

"Take her out," Marty said.

The old man nodded, and Val, after a wild, almost feral stare at me, hurried after him. I made no move to stop her, called no reassuring words after her. I had been vampirized, and could only wait.

Marty stood, then, and slowly followed them. I turned on the ground. I thought of jumping and killing him, but dismissed it. Marty would die sooner than he thought, and would live to regret it. His friend must have learned how to harness and focus that rage/power from others before him; Marty had obviously learned it from him, and I suppose now that it must take a special kind of fury that only dreamers can muster. But why he didn't learn, why he didn't take the warning of the after effects, I still don't know. I don't even know if that other man had been a teacher, a preacher or a young-and-coming politician. Not that it matters.

And I have to admit he did try to warn us with those Shakespearean omens, to remind us of the Prince's caution not to take lightly that which we do not know.

"The house is yours," Marty said. "Take care of it, while it lasts."

"Hey, mind if I ask you something? How many places like

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this one are there?"

"As many as there are people like me. And him."

"Do we all get a house?"

"No. Some just walk. Others float. One or two fly. It's all the same, Eddie. It's all the same."

And he left, and I rose to my feet and staggered around until my legs decided they'd work for a while longer. I explored and found food, though I didn't think I'd need it. I decided this must be a thing...a something about time and space displacement, a nondimensional locus of a dreamer's rage. There's probably an empty field now where the house was. And as long as Marty lived, I knew I'd be here. And when he died, the hold on the house and me, and all the others, would be gone; and thus would I die.

I did wonder, though, who had the worst of this nightmare. Marty, I often thought, because he could only call upon this power once and is even now trapped in the world of the living to watch his dreams shred like so much yellowing cloth. Of course, I've also collapsed in self-pity, repenting my cynicism and wordliness to all the walls of his house, promising the sky and apple pie. But never for long.

If I am doomed to be a cynic, then he is doomed to be a romantic. What comes after, I don't like to consider. If it's more of the same....

And the end cometh. Marty is dying. The lights begin to fail room by room, and there is cold. Outside, where there is nothing but fog, the light turns black. I have a radio that had somehow — thanks, Marty, for that anyway — kept me in touch with the musical world, but the bands fade one by one. I can find only a single station now, and I wonder if Val can hear it, floating, walking, encased in her own fog, and dying. I still twiddle around until I can finally catch it, then hold the radio close to my ear and listen as if it were the laugh of little children. But all I can hear is "After the Ball."

The rest, dear Hamlet, is silence.

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LOOK LONG UPON A MONKEY

Considering that I work so hard at establishing my chosen persona of the man who is cheerfully self-appreciative, I am sometimes absurdly sensitive to the fact that every once in a while people who don't know me take the persona for myself.

I was interviewed a couple of weeks ago by a newspaper reporter who was an exceedingly pleasant fellow, but who clearly knew very little about me. I was curious enough, therefore, to ask why he had decided to interview me.

He explained without hesitation. "My boss asked me to interview you," he said. Then he smiled a little and added, "He has strong, ambivalent feelings about you."

I said, "You mean he likes my writing but thinks I am arrogant and conceited."

"Yes," he said, clearly surprised. "How did you know?"

"Lucky guess," I said, with a sigh.

You see, it's *not* arrogance and conceit; it's cheerful self-appreciation, and anyone who knows me has no trouble seeing the difference.

Of course, I could save myself this trouble by choosing a different persona, by practicing aw-shucks modesty and learning how to dig

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

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my toe into the ground and bring the pretty pink to my cheeks at the slightest word of praise.

But no, thanks. I write on just about every subject and for every age-level, and once I begin to practice a charming diffidence, I would make myself doubt my own ability to do so, and that would be ruinous.

So I'll go right along the path I have chosen and endure the ambivalent feelings that come my way, for the sake of having the self-assurance to write my wide-ranging F & SF articles — like this one on evolution.

I suspect that if man* could only have been left out of it, there would never have been any trouble about accepting biological evolution.

Anyone can see, for instance, that some animals resemble each other closely. Who can deny that a dog and a wolf resemble each other in important ways; or a tiger and a leopard; or a lobster and a crab? Twenty-three centuries ago, the Greek philosopher, Aristole, lumped different types of species together and prepared a "ladder of life," by arranging those types from the simplest plants upward to the most complex animals, with (inevitably, man at the top).

Once this was done, we moderns could say, with the clear vision of hindsight, that it was inevitable that people should come to see that one type of species had changed into another; that the more complex had developed from the less complex; that, in short, there was not only a ladder of life, but a system whereby life-forms climbed that ladder.

Not so! Neither Aristotle nor those who came after him for two thousand years moved from the ladder of life as a static concept, to one that was a dynamic and evolutionary one.

The various species, it was considered, were *permanent.* There might be families and hierarchies of species, but that was the way in which life was created from the beginning. Resemblances had existed from the beginning, it was maintained, and no species grew to resemble each other more, or less, with the passage of time.

My feeling is that the insistence on this constancy of species arose, at least in part, out of the uncomfortable feeling that once change was allowed, man would lose his uniqueness and become "just another animal."

**Anyone who reads these essays knows that I am a women's libber, but I also have a love for the English language. I try to circumlocute "man" when I mean "human being" but the flow of sound suffers sometimes when I do. Please accept, in this article, "man" in the general, embracing "woman." (Yes, I know what I said.)*

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Once Christianity grew dominant in the western world, views on the constancy of species became even more rigid. Not only did Genesis 1 clearly describe the creation of the various species of life as already differentiated and in their present form, but man was created differently from all the rest. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ..." (Genesis 1:26).

No other living thing was made in God's image, and that placed an insuperable barrier between man and all other living things. Any view that led to the belief that the barriers between species generally were not leak-proof tended to weaken that all-important barrier protecting man.

It would have been nice, of course, if all the life-forms on Earth were enormously different from man so that the insuperable barrier would be clearly reflected physically. Unfortunately, the Mediterranean world was acquainted, even in early times, with certain animals we now call "monkeys."

The various monkeys with which the ancients came in contact had faces that, in some cases, looked like those of shrivelled little men. They had hands that clearly resembled human hands and they fingered things as human beings did and with a clearly lively curiosity. However, they had tails and that, it itself, rather saved the day. The human being is so pronouncedly tailless and most of the animals we know are so pronouncedly tailed that that, in itself, would seem to be a symbol of that insuperable barrier between man and monkey.

There are, indeed, some animals without tails or with very short tails, such as frogs, guinea pigs, and bears, but these, even without tails, do not threaten man's status. And yet —

There is a reference to a monkey in the Bible, one for which the translaters used a special word. In discussing King Solomon's trading ventures, the Bible says (1 Kings 10:22), "...once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks."

Tharshish is often identified as Tartessus, a city on the Spanish coast just west of the Strait of Gibraltar; a flourishing trading center in Solomon's time that was destroyed by the Carthaginians in 480 B.C. In northwestern Africa, near Tartessus, there existed then (and now) a type of monkey of the macaque group. It was this macaque that was called an "ape," and in later years, when northwestern Africa became part of "Barbary" to Europeans, it came to be called "Barbary ape."

The Barbary ape is tailless and therefore more resembles man than

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other monkeys do. Aristotle, in his ladder of life, placed the Barbary ape at the top of the monkey group, just under man. Galen, the Roman physician of about 200 A.D. dissected apes and showed the resemblance to man to be internal as well as external.

It was the resemblance to man that made the Barbary ape amusing to the ancients, and yet annoying as well. The Roman poet, Ennius, is quoted as saying, "The ape, vilest of beasts, how like to us!" Was the ape really the vilest of beasts? Objectively, of course not. It was its resemblance to man and its threat, therefore, to man's cherished uniqueness that made it vile.

In medieval times, when the uniqueness and supremacy of man had become a cherished dogma, the existence of the ape was even more annoying. They were equated with the Devil. The Devil, after all, was a fallen and distorted angel, and as man had been created in God's image, so the ape was created in the Devil's.

Yet no amount of explanation removed the unease. The English dramatist. William Congreve, wrote in 1695: "I could never look long upon a monkey, without very mortifying reflections." It is not so hard to guess that those mortifying reflections must have been to the effect that man might be described as a large and somewhat more intelligent ape.

Modern times made matters worse by introducing the proud image-of-God European to animals, hitherto unknown, which resembled him even more closely than the Barbary ape did.

In 1641, a description was published of an animal brought from Africa and kept in the Netherlands in a menagerie belonging to the Prince of Orange. From the description it seems to have been a chimpanzee. There were also reports of a large man-like animal in Borneo, one we now call the orang-utan.

The chimpanzee and the orang-utan were called "apes" because like the Barbary ape, they lacked tails. In later years, when it was recognized that the chimpanzee and orang-utan resembled monkeys less and men more, they came to be known as "anthropoid apes" ("man-like").

In 1758, the Swedish naturalist, Carolus Linnaeus, made the first thoroughly systematic attempt to classify all species. He was a firm believer in the permanence of species, and it did not concern him that some animal species closely resembled man — that was just the way they were created.

He therefore did not hesitate to lump the various species of apes and

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monkey together, *with man included as well,* and call that group "Primates," from a Latin word for "first," since it included man. We still use the term.

The monkeys and apes, generally, Linnaeus put into one subgroup of Primates and called that subgroup "Simia" from the Latin word for "ape." For human beings, Linnaeus invented a sub-group, "Homo," which is the Latin word for "man." Linnaeus used a double name for each species (called "binomial nomenclature," with the family name first, like Smith, John and Smith, William) so human beings rejoiced in the name "Homo sapiens" ("Man, wise") But Linnaeus placed another member in that group. Having read the description of the Bornean orang-utan, he named it "Homo troglodytes" ("Man, cave-dwelling").

Orang-utan is from a Malay word meaning "man of the forest." The Malays, who were there on the spot, were more accurate in their description, for the orang-utan is a forest-dweller and not a cave-dweller, but either way it cannot be considered near enough to man to warrant the Homo designation.

The French naturalist, Georges de Buffon, was the first, in the middle 1700s, to describe the gibbons, which represent a third kind of anthropoid ape. The various gibbons are the smallest of the anthropoids and the least like man. They are sometimes put to one side for that reason and the remaining anthropoids are called the "great apes."

As the classification of species grew more detailed, naturalists were more and more tempted to break down the barriers between them. Some species were so similar to other species that it was uncertain whether any boundary at all could be drawn between them. Besides, more and more animals showed signs of being caught in the middle of change.

The horse, Buffon noted, had two "splints" on either side of its leg-bones, which seemed to indicate that once there had been three lines of bones there and three hooves to each leg.

Buffon argued that if hooves and bones could degenerate, so might entire species. Perhaps God had created only certain species and that each of these had, to some extent, degenerated and formed additional species. If horses could lose some of their hooves, why might not some of them have degenerated all the way to donkeys.

Since Buffon had to speculate on what was after all the big news in man-centered natural history, he suggested that apes were degenerated men.

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Buffon was the first to suggest the mutability of species. It was a suggestion that avoided the worst danger — that of suggesting that man-the-image-of-God had once been something else — but it did say that man could *become* something else. Even that was too much, for once the boundaries were made to leak in one direction, it would be hard to make it leak-proof in the other. The pressure was placed on Buffon to recant, and recant he did.

The notion of the mutability of species did not die, however. A British physician, Erasmus Darwin, had the habit of writing long poems of indifferent quality in which he presented his oft-times interesting scientific theories. In his last book, "Zoonomia," published in 1796, he amplified Buffon's idea and suggested that species underwent changes as a result of the direct influence upon them of the environment.

This was carried still further by the French naturalist, Jean Baptiste de Lamarck, who, in 1809, published "Zoological Philosophy" and was the first scientist of note to advance a theory of evolution, a thorough-going description of the mechanisms by which an antelope, for instance, could conceivably change, little by little over the generations, into a giraffe. (Both Darwin and Lamarck were virtually ostracized by the establishments, both scientific and non-scientific, of those days.)

Lamarck was wrong in his notion of the evolutionary mechanism, but his book made the concept of evolution well-known in the scientific world and it inspired others to find a perhaps more workable mechanism.*

The man who turned the trick was the English naturalist, Charles Robert Darwin (grandson of Erasmus Darwin) who spent nearly twenty years gathering data and polishing his argument. This he did, firstly, because he was a naturally meticulous man. Secondly, he knew the fate that awaited anyone who advanced an evolutionary theory, and he wanted to disarm the enemy by making his arguments cast-iron.

**Anti-evolutionists usually denounce evolution as "merely a theory" and cite various uncertainties in the details, uncertainties that are admitted by biologists. In this, the anti-evolutionists are being fuzzy-minded. That evolution has taken place is as nearly a fact as anything non-trivial can be. The exact details of the mechanism by which evolution proceeds, however, remain theoretical in many respects. The mechanism, however, is not the thing. Thus, very few people really understand the mechanism by which an automobile runs, but those who are uncertain of the mechanism do not argue from that that the automobile itself does not exist.*

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When he published his book, "On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection" in 1859, he carefully refrained from discussing man in it. That didn't help, of course. He was a gentle and virtuous man, as nearly a saint as any cleric in the kingdom, but if he had bitten his mother to death, he couldn't have been denounced more viciously.

Yet the evidence in favor of evolution kept piling up. In 1847, the largest of the anthropoid apes, the gorilla, was finally brought into the light of European day, and it was the most dramatic of them. In size, at least, it seemed most nearly human, or even superhuman.

Then, too, in 1856, the very first fossil remnants of an organism that was clearly more advanced than any of the living anthropoids and as clearly more primitive than any living man, was discovered. This was "Neanderthal Man." Not only was the evidence in favor of evolution steadily rising, but so was the evidence in favor of *human* evolution.

In 1863, the Scottish geologist, Charles Lyell, published "The Antiquity of Man" which used the evidence of ancient stone tools to argue that mankind was much older than the 6,000 years allotted him (and the Universe) in the Bible. He also came out strongly in favor of the Darwinian view of evolution.

And in 1871 Darwin finally carried the argument to man with his book "The Descent of Man."

The anti-evolutionists remain with us, of course, to this day, ardent and firm in their cause. I get more than my share of letters from them so that I know what their arguments are like.

They concentrate on one point, and on one point only — the descent of man. I have never once received any letter arguing emotionally that the beaver is *not* related to the rat, or that the whale is *not* descended from a land-mammal. I sometimes think they don't even realize the evolution applies to all species. Their only insistence is that man is not, *not* NOT descended from or related to apes or monkeys.

Some evolutionists try to counter this by saying that Darwin never said that man is descended from monkeys, that no living primate is an ancestor of man. This, however, is a quibble. The evolutionary view is that man and the apes had some common ancestor that is not alive today but that looked like a primitive ape when it was alive. Going further back, man's various ancestors had a distinct monkeyish appearance — to the non-zoologist at least.

As an evolutionist, I prefer to maintain that man *did* descend from monkeys, as the simplest way of stating what I believe to be the fact.

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And we've got to stick to monkeys in another way, too. Evolutionists may talk about the early hominids, about Homo erectus, the Australopithecines and so on. We may use that as evidence of the evolution of man and of the type of organism from which he descended.

This, I suspect, doesn't carry conviction to the anti-evolutionists, or even bother them much. Their view seems to be that when a bunch of infidels who call themselves scientists find a tooth here, a thighbone there and a piece of skull yonder, and jigsaw them all together into a kind of ape-man, that doesn't mean a thing.

From the mail I get and from the literature I've seen, it seems to me that the emotionalism of the anti-evolutionist boils itself down to man and monkey, and nothing more.

There are two ways in which an anti-evolutionist, it seems to me, can handle the man-and-monkey issue. He can stand pat on the bible, declare that it is divinely inspired and that it says man was created out of the dust of the Earth by God, in the image of God, six thousand years ago, and that's it. If that is his position, his views are clearly non-negotiable, and there is no point in trying to negotiate. I will discuss the weather with such a person, but not evolution.

A second way is for the anti-evolutionist to attempt some rational justification for his stand; one, that is, that does not rest on authority, but can be tested by observation or experiment and argued logically. For instance, one might argue that the differences between man and all other animals are so fundamental that it is unthinkable that they be bridged and that no animal can conceivably develop into a man by the operation of nothing more than the laws of nature — that supernatural intervention is required.

An example of such an unbridgeable difference is a claim, for instance, that man has a soul and that no animal has one, and that a soul cannot be developed by any evolutionary procedure. Unfortunately, there is no way of measuring or detecting a soul except by referring to some sort of mystical authority. This falls outside observation or experiment, then.

On a less exalted plane, an anti-evolutionist might argue that man has a sense of right and wrong; that he has an appreciation of justice; that he is, in short, a moral organism while animals are not and cannot be.

That, I think, leaves room for argument. There are animals that act as though they love their young and that sometimes give their lives for them. There are animals that cooperate and protect each other in danger. Such

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behavior has survival value and it is exactly the sort of thing that evolutionists would expect to see developed bit by bit, until it reaches the level found in Man.

If you were to argue that such apparently "human" behavior in animals is purely mechanical and is done without understanding, then once again we are back to argument by mere assertion. We don't know what goes on inside an animal's mind and, for that matter, it is by no means certain that our own behavior isn't as mechanical as that of animals—only a degree more complicated and versatile.

There was a time when things were easier than they are now, when comparative anatomy was in its beginnings, and when it was possible to suppose that there was some gross physiological difference that set off man from all other animals. In the 17th Century, the French philosopher, Rene Descartes, thought the pineal gland was the seat of the soul, for he accepted the then-current notion that it was found only in the human being and in no other organism whatever.

Alas, not so. The pineal gland is found in all vertebrates and is most highly developed in a certain primitive reptile called the tuatara. As a matter of fact, there is no portion of the physical body which the human being owns to the exclusion of all other species.

Suppose we get more subtle and consider the biochemistry of organisms. Here the differences are much less marked than in the physical shape of the body and its parts. Indeed, there is so much similarity in the biochemical workings of *all* organisms, not only if we compare men and monkeys, but if we compare men and bacteria, that if it weren't for preconceived notions and species-centered conceit, the fact of evolution would be considered self-evident.

We must get very subtle indeed and begin to study the very fine chemical structure of the all-but-infinitely versatile protein molecule in order to find something distinctive for each species. Then, by the tiny differences in that chemical structure, one can get a rough measure of how long ago in time two organisms may have branched away from a common ancestor.

By studying protein structure, we find no large gaps; no differences between one species and all others that is so huge as to indicate a common ancestor so long ago that in all the history of Earth there was no time for such divergence to have taken place. If such a large gap existed between one species and all the rest, then that one species would have arisen from a different globule of primordial life than that which gave birth to all the

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rest. It would still have evolved, still have descended from more primitive species, but it would not be related to any other Earthly life-form. I repeat, however, that no such gap has been found and none is expected. *All* Earthly life is interrelated.

Certainly man is not separated from other forms of life by some large biochemical gap. Biochemically, he falls within the primate group and is not particularly more separate than the others are. In fact, he seems quite closely related to the chimpanzee. The chimpanzee, by the protein structure test, is closer to man than he is to the gorilla or orang-utan.

So it is from the chimpanzee, specifically, that the anti-evolutionist must protect us. Surely, if we "look long upon the monkey" in Congreve's words, (meaning the chimpanzee in this case) we must admit it differs from us in nothing vital but the brain. The human brain is four times the size of the chimpanzee brain!

It might seem that even this large difference in size is but a difference in degree, and one that can be easily explained by evolutionary development — especially since fossil hominids had brains intermediate in size between the chimpanzee and modern man.

The anti-evolutionist, however, might dismiss fossil hominids as unworthy of discussion and go on to maintain that it is not the physical size of the brain that counts, but the quality of the intelligence it mediates. It can be argued that human intelligence so far surpasses chimpanzee intelligence that any thought of a relationship between the two species is out of the question.

For instance, a chimpanzee cannot talk. Efforts to teach young chimpanzees to talk, however patient, skillful, and prolonged, have always failed. And without speech, the chimpanzee remains nothing but an animal; intelligent for an animal, but just an animal. With speech, man climbs to the heights of Plato, Beethoven and Einstein.

But might it be that we are confusing communication with speech? Speech is, admittedly the most effective and delicate form of communication ever conceived. (Our modern devices from books to television sets transmit speech in other forms, but it is still speech.) — But is speech all?

Human speech depends upon human ability to control rapid and delicate movements of throat, mouth, tongue and lips and all this seems to be under the control of a portion of the brain called "Broca's convolution." If Broca's convolution is damaged by a tumor, or by a blow, a human being suffers from aphasia, and can neither speak nor

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understand speech. — Yet such a human being retains intelligence and is able to make himself understood by gesture, for instance.

The section of the chimpanzee brain equivalent to "Broca's convolution" is not large enough or complex enough to make speech in the human sense possible, but what about gesture? Chimpanzees use gestures to communicate in the wild —

Back in June, 1966, then, Beatrice and Allen Gardner at the University of Nevada chose a 1-1/2-year-old female chimpanzee they named Washoe, and decided to try to teach her a deaf-and-dumb language. The results amazed them and the world.

Washoe readily learned dozens of gestures, using them appropriately to communicate desires and abstractions. She invented new modifications which she also used appropriately. She tried to teach the language to other chimpanzees, and she clearly enjoyed communicating.

Other chimpanzees have been similarly trained. Some have been taught to arrange and rearrange magnetized counters on a wall. In so doing, they showed themselves capable of taking grammar and punctuation into account, and were not fooled when their teachers deliberately created nonsense sentences.

Nor is it a matter of conditioned reflexes. Every line of evidence shows that chimpanzees know what they are doing, in the same sense that human beings know what they are doing when they talk.

To be sure, the chimpanzee language is very simple, compared to man's. Man is still enormously the more intelligent. However, Washoe's feat makes even our ability to speak differ from the chimpanzee's in degree only, not in kind.

"Look long upon a monkey." There are no valid arguments, save those resting on mystical authority, that serve to deny the cousinship of the chimpanzee to man, or the evolutionary development of Homo sapiens from non-Homo non-sapiens.

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Henning was facing five weeks in space, with no company except for a sophisticated computer and no particular interests save one: a yen for playing the horses . . .

Spacetrack

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

Henning felt sorry for Castelaine and Burns when he said the usual few words over them and consigned their bodies to deep space. He also felt sorry for himself.

This is no reflection on Henning. He had good cause to feel sorry for himself.

The services over, he hurried up to the *Starwagon's* bridge. "I need your help, ANN," he said to the Administrative Navigational Neuro-electro complex that ran the ship and acted as housemother to the crew.

ANN was watching an old movie on the bridge screen. She watched them all the time. She turned it down and brightened the lights. "Do you know this is the first time you've ever come near me, Hank? Why?"

"I never needed you for anything before," Henning said.

She was as remote from the primitive computers that partially constituted her ancestry as he was from the pithecanthropus that partially constituted his. His visible portions covered the forward and port bulkheads, giving the latter features that, if properly put together, would have formed a larger-than-life human face. Her speaker resembled a pair of lips, her output tube a nose seen in profile, and there were two centrally located image receivers that functioned as — and looked very much like — eyes. If desired, the anthropomorphosis could be carried one step further by interpreting the mass of wires that comprised her exterior circuits as golden hair.

Next to her nose was a little window that from a distance could have passed for a beauty mark and into which data could be inserted or withdrawn; and sharing the forward bulkhead were her com screen

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— vacant at the moment — and the starscreen, which held a scattering of stars, indistinct by reason of their distance and rendered more so by transee.

"It's a shame about Castelaine and Burns," she continued in her pleasant *jeune fille* voice. "However, there's no reason for you to be alarmed. I'm equipped to handle situations like this."

"You're also equipped to avert them," Henning pointed out. "Why didn't you?"

"Because even though my genes are synthetic, I'm still human in a way, and that makes me fallible. I attributed the loss of pressure in Number 4 hold to normal fluctuation. Anyway, Castelaine and Burns shouldn't have tried to repair the air seal themselves — they should have sent for HERM."

"They should have, but they didn't." Henning sighed. "So now you've got a real problem on your hands: the maintenance of my mental stability. I guess I don't need to tell you it'll be five more weeks before we reach Sigma Sagittarii 6."

"Although the space medics consider a minimum of three men to be a vital survival factor on radio-voided voyages lasting more than two weeks," ANN said pedagogically, "there's no real reason to suppose that one man — provided he's kept preoccupied — can't retain his mental equilibrium for five, even when, like you, he's already been in space for seventeen. Do you play chess, Hank?"

"No."

"Too bad. Chess would have been our best bet. Checkers?"

"The only thing I've ever played is the horses."

"The horses. H'm-m."

"So you see, it's hopeless," Henning said. "I'll be crawling up the bulkheads long before Sigma Sagittarii even shows on the starscreen."

"Nothing is hopeless," ANN said. "Not even the human race."

Henning glanced at the bridge clock. It said 1750 hours. "Guess I'll go dress for dinner," he said gloomily.

"Come back later. I may have a surprise for you."

Dressing for dinner was a psychological antidote to the mutual contempt any given three men on any given long voyage eventually came to hold one another in. Although there was little point in Henning's donning his spaceman's blues with Castelaine and Burns gone, he did so anyway.

The mess hall, once so small and crowded, now seemed inordinately large and empty. He resolved henceforth to eat in the kitchen where COOK was. She couldn't

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talk, but any kind of company was better than none. Meanwhile, he turned on some canned music. It kept the silence at bay, but not the memories. He had disliked both Burns and Castelaine, and he had hated the former's habit of gargling with his coffee and the latter's interminable Mother Goose jokes. But by the time COOK served dessert via her bewheeled waitress, he'd have given half his slice of apple pie to have heard just one gurgle and the other half to have heard just one joke — preferably the one about Old King Cole and Goosy-Goosy Gander.

Before returning to the bridge to see what ANN's surprise was, he had a look at the main-deck monitor screens. Burns had been senior officer, Castelaine second-in-command. Henning now wore both their shoes as well as his own. He paid particular attention to the trajectory-transee screen. Its smooth flow line indicated that the *Starwagon* was exactly on course and traveling at maximum ftl velocity. It also indicated that ANN was on the ball.

It had been feared when transee — ftl velocity — first became feasible that there might be compensatory side effects. Happily, none had ever been detected, eliminating any need for correctional devices.

All was well. Henning climbed the companionway to the bridge. ANN could throw anything on her com screen from the psalms of David to *The Communist Manifesto.* Tonight she had gone far afield and thrown something altogether different on it — something Henning had all but given up hope of ever seeing again:

FIRST	Mile Pace	$9,000	
3 Starflake Girl	G. Jones	4-5-2	5-2
1 Miss Nellie Nebula	H. Walker	5-4-4	4-1
2 Bode's Lawyer	C. Kolgocz	3-4-2	6-1
8 Orbit Annie	J. Feather	3-1-5	8-1
5 Blast-off Boy	R. James	2-5-4	8-1
4 Moonmaid	T. Cooper	6-6-3	5-1
6 By Jimminy Jetstream	D. Spatz	1-7-1	8-1
7 Parsec	C. Caponi	1-6-8	10-1

"Gosh, but you look nice in you blues," ANN said.

Henning didn't even hear her.

"That's only the first spacerace — I'm still working on the second," she continued. "Betting will be confined to the daily double, and you'll be limited to one bet per day. If I'm going to run two heats every evening and introduce new drivers and new horses as I go along, I've got to keep matters on a simplistic level. I've adjusted one of my auxiliary units to work as a sort of scrambler. Its only function, however, will be to determine the double — there won't be any race results as such. I'll simply feed all the info pertaining to both spaceraces into it, plus a human-equine unpredictability factor necessarily lacking in mere facts and figures. And in about half an

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hour's time it'll select the two most logical winners. Their numbers will be relayed to me, and I'll post them on my com screen. Sound okay to you, Hank?"

"But the whole thing's only make-believe," Henning objected, coming out of his trance. "There won't be any horses, any track, any —"

"What percentage of the number of people who play the horses ever actually see them race, Hank?"

"But that's different. In off-track betting, real money changes hands and —"

"Exactly. It's the money that makes them real."

"But nobody besides me has any money."

"You forget that freighters not only have a standing credit-account but carry emergency funds as well, and that I'm ship's treasurer."

"But you can't use company money to make book with, for Pete's sake!"

"Who says I can't? During an emergency I'm authorized to do anything I see fit to maintain the morale of the crew. How much money do you have, Hank?"

"Four hundred sixty dollars," Henning said. "I played a long shot the day before we left Earth, and it came in."

"Not a bad stake. But I think I'll impose a $10 limit just in case you run into a streak of bad luck. You can put back anything you win, of course. By tomorrow morning I'll have the second race posted, and the first two heats will be run starting at 2000 hours tomorrow night. You'll have up till 1800 hours to place your bet, which will give you all day to study the form."

"What form?"

"The racing form I'm going to issue at 0600 containing lists of the two spaceraces, brief biographies and psychological analyses of the drivers, histories and temperament studies of the horses, and vital statistics such as the weather forecast, probable track conditions, and so forth."

"Wow! — I can hardly wait till tomorrow!"

Strange little stars — reflections probably — appeared in ANN's image receivers. "I thought you'd be pleased. See you in the morning, Hank."

Henning knew he'd never be able to sleep with so many horses running through his head, and so he stopped into sick bay and asked DOC for a sleeping pill. DOC — Druggist, Operative-surgeon and Clinician — didn't argue as he ordinarily would have, no doubt attributing Henning's tension to the demise of Castelaine and Burns, news of which he had

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probably received from ANN via the radio band she used for communicating with the ship's *entia machina.* After giving Henning a quick once-over with the big overhead operating lamp that functioned as his image receiver, or eye, and which, together with the neuroelectro ganglion under the deck, the operating table, his five articulated metal arms and his five plastic ten-fingered hands, constituted his physique and physiognomy, he complied with Henning's request.

Henning took the pill and went directly to bed. At 0600 hours he awoke, shaved, showered and dressed; then he proceeded directly to the bridge where, true to her word, ANN had the racing form ready for him. The second spacerace was posted on the com screen underneath the first:

SECOND	Mile Trot	$10,000	
7 Galaxy Girl	M. Shriner	3-6-6	5-1
6 Mercury Maid	R. Hopkins	3-2-7	3-1
4 Startrotter	P. Larkin	4-4-2	4-1
5 Little Andromeda	L. Segar	3-1-2	6-1
1 FTL Boy	U. Andrews	4-7-6	6-1
2 Miss Bright	Y. Helper	4-4-5	8-1
8 Starstrider	H. Kulp	8-3-2	8-1
3 Syzygy	R. Washington	6-4-5	10-1

He studied the form at the kitchen table over his eggs, bacon and toast. Sensing someone peering over his shoulder he turned his head expecting to see Castelaine or Burns, forgetting in his absorption that both were dead. Naturally he saw no one.

Except COOK.

COOK — Culinary Operator and Officer's Katerer — consisted, in addition to an inbuilt ganglion, of ten articulated metal arms, ten twelve-fingered plastic hands, a stove, a refrigerator, a deep-freeze, a toaster, a mixing bowl and an electric eggbeater. Her image receivers were located just above the sink and were disguised as a pair of portholes. Henning studied them, but it was impossible to tell whether they were focused on the form or on the opposite bulkhead. Besides, why should she be interested in harness racing?

He folded the form, stuck it in his back pocket and went to check on HERM. HERM — Handy and Electrical Repair Man — was a perambulatory *ens machina.* He wasn't much to look at — an oblong metal box equipped with six articulated extension arms, six ten-fingered flexible steel hands, four rubber-tired wheels and a light-bulblike image receiver attached to the end of a flexible steel cable — but he was a whiz at maintenance and could repair anything from a dripping faucet to a cation-anion micro correlator-strobe.

Henning found him in the machine shop turning down a buttress bar on the big engine lathe. "How'd you make out with the 4-hold air seal, HERM?"

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"I installed a new gasket. She won't blow again."

"Good."

Henning proceeded from the machine shop to Cargo Control, where he inspected each of the six holds on the monitor screens. All of them contained farm machinery destined for the grain prairies of Sigma Sagittarii 6. Those in Number 4 had suffered no apparent damage from their exposure to absolute-zero temperature. Satisfied, he reached into his back pocket for the racing form.

It wasn't there.

It must have fallen out of his pocket. He retraced his steps to the machine shop, looking for it. Re-entering the shop, he said, "HERM, I lost a folded sheet of paper. Did you —" Then he saw that HERM had the form in one of his flexible steel hands and was handing it to him.

"I found it lying on the deck," HERM said.

"Thanks, HERM."

Henning descended the aft companionway to the Drive Room to see whether any red lights were flashing on the ceiling-high indicator panel. None were. He was about to open the racing form when ANN's voice came over the intercom: "Hank, DOC wants to see you."

Frowning, Henning ascended the companionway to the main deck and made his way forward. Why should the old neuroelectro pill pusher want to see him? Still frowning, he entered sick bay. DOC regarded him with his big gleaming eye. "Morning, Hank. How'd you sleep?"

"Like sixty," Henning said. "Why?"

"Just wondered whether the pill helped ... what's that in your shirt pocket?"

"Just a racing form."

"A facing form? May I see it?"

Henning handed it to him. "H'm-m," DOC said.

"I've got to be going, DOC," Henning said. "Have to check out the grav generator. Used to be Castelaine's job."

DOC handed the form back. "Keeps you humping, doesn't it? — doing their work and yours too."

"Not exactly. Their workloads were moderate — same as mine."

It was the understatement of the century. There was about as much need for human crews on modern space carriers as there had been for firemen in twentieth-century Diesel locomotives.

After studying the form off and on for the rest of the day, Henning decided on Bode's Lawyer in the first and Galaxy Girl in the second. He placed his bet at the little window next to ANN's nose, received a ticket with 2 and 7

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printed on it in exchange for his ten-spot. "How are you going to determine the amount of the double, ANN?" he asked.

"Unorthodoxly. It'll be two percent of the attendance figure in dollars. The attendance itself will be determined by the weather, which in turn will be determined by the meteorological info I feed into the scrambler. However, since I can't afford to go broke, there'll be a limit of 10,000 on the attendance figure, which means the double will never exceed $200."

"I should have warned you," Henning said. "Back on Earth, the bookies used to lock their doors when they saw me coming."

"If I saw you coming, I wouldn't lock *my* door. I'd fling it wide open."

"You must think I'm a born loser."

"That's not what I meant at all. I made the remark out of context. Please disregard it."

Puzzled, Henning gazed up into her image receivers. He didn't expect them to tell him anything, but they were the only part of her that conceivably could. They seemed to be filled with a silvery mist. Then it occurred to him that they might be reflecting the movie screen on the opposite bulkhead.

He decided that this was the case. "See you after the races," he said, and left the bridge.

To kill time, he watched an old Marilyn Monroe movie in the rec room. He didn't share ANN's penchant for such fare. Hers was built in and designed to lend her a more human flavor. It made as much sense, Henning supposed, as employing synthetic hormones to make a machine male or female. Not that ANN was a machine exactly. Nevertheless, she was the great-great-great-granddaughter of one.

The movie had nothing to do with horses, but throughout it he kept hearing hoofbeats. It was as though a race-track encircled the *Starwagon's* hull and a mile pace was in progress. He forced himself to wait till 2030 hours, then returned to the bridge. ANN had just finished erasing her com screen, and as he stepped onto the bridge a single line of type appeared. He gaped.

ATTENDANCE: 9,520
DAILY DOUBLE: 7-2
--pays $190.40

"You didn't do so good, Hank," ANN remarked.

Henning took a deep breath. "Well, anyway, no one else had 7 and 2 either."

"Correction: COOK had it."

"Well, I'll be darned!" Henning said. "So she *was* looking over my shoulder! But what's an *ens*

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machina going to do with $190.40? And where'd she get the $10 to bet with in the first place?"

"You forget — or maybe you didn't know — that she has a standing account for culinary and food supplies, the same as DOC does for drugs and surgical supplies, and HERM for tools and material. Once they'd radioed me their bets, all I had to do was transfer $10 from each of their accounts to the *Starwagon's*. And all I have to do now is transfer the $190.40 COOK won from the *Starwagon's* account to hers."

"So DOC and HERM were in on it too! I should have guessed!"

"After this, I'll relay all the necessary info to them. Then they won't have to keep sneaking eidetic photos of your racing form. You don't mind their playing too, do you, Hank?"

"No, I suppose not ... I can't figure COOK winning, though. What does *she* know about horses?"

"Nothing. She merely bet the first two digits of her serial number."

"Humph!" Henning said, and strode off the bridge.

Early the next morning he picked up the second issue of the racing form. He studied it sedulously all day, settled finally on a double that couldn't miss: 3 and 1. That evening he played it. 1 and 3 came in and paid $183. 22. DOC had it.

The following evening Henning bet 2 and 5. 5 and 2 came in and paid $197.22. HERM had it.

Later that evening in the machine shop Henning asked HERM what system he used. "System?" HERM said.

"Yes. For instance, do you go more by the last three outs than by the early odds, or vice versa?"

"Outs? Odds?"

"For Pete's sake," Henning said, "you couldn't have plucked 5 and 2 out of deep space!"

"They're the last two digits of the model number on my electric drill," HERM said. "The rest of the number is worn off and —"

Henning strode out of the shop.

The ensuing two weeks pretty much followed the pattern established the first three days. Henning continued to pick doubles based on exhaustive analyses of ANN's daily forms, and almost invariably their opposites paid off. And — almost invariably — one of the three *entia machina* was the winner.

True, the winning doubles weren't *always* inversions of Henning's selections, and, true, DOC, COOK, and HERM didn't *always* win. But Henning *always* lost.

His wounds would have been salved somewhat if any of the three

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entia machina picked their doubles scientifically. But none of them did, not even DOC. Instead, they played parts and combinations of their serial numbers, their ages, parts numbers, prescription numbers, and what-have-you. Once COOK even played the date on a can of beans. 2 and 4. It came in and paid $199.98.

As though to aggravate him further, the three *entia machina* began neglecting their duties. COOK fried his eggs too long and burned his toast; HERM left tools lying all over the place; and DOC became so preoccupied with nonmedical matters that one day when Henning came to him with a simple headache he prescribed zyloprim instead of aspirin.

Fortunately Henning noticed the word on the prescription bottle. "For Pete's sake, DOC," he said, "I haven't got the gout! All I've got is a headache. I'm too young to have the gout."

"Sorry," DOC said. "Guess my ganglion was somewhere else. Anyway, Zyloprim wouldn't have hurt you. And it might conceivably have kept you from getting the gout later on in life."

Another weird week went by. Henning played 2-3, 6-7, 8-7, 1-8, 6-2, 2-6, and 4-7. 3-2, 7-1, 7-8, 8-1, 2-6, 6-2, and 2-1 came in. DOC and COOK won one apiece, and HERM two times.

Henning paid ANN a visit. He visited her every day, of course, but those were routine visits. This one wasn't.

"ANN," he said, "I hate to have to accuse you. But your races are rigged. They *have* to be."

She had been watching an old Rock Hudson movie. She turned it off. "I've been dreading this visit for days, Hank."

"Then you admit they're rigged."

"I admit that ever since the first week I've been trying to rig them — so you'd win. Almost every horse you've picked so far should have come in, even without my help. But even with it, none of them has."

"Then there must be something wrong with the scrambler."

"I've checked it out and there isn't a thing wrong with it. Maybe it just doesn't pay to play scientifically. Why don't you try it COOK's and DOC's and HERM's way for a change? You can start by playing your age: 2 and 8."

"If I did I'll bet 8 and 2 would come in!" Henning said savagely.

"Then why don't you continue with the same method, only when the time comes to bet, bet your picks backwards."

"Never in a million years! That would be the same thing as admitting I don't know any more about horses than COOK does."

"All right — why don't you pick

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two horses that have the same number? Most of the time when you lose it's because you picked the right horse in the wrong race, or vice versa."

"But I can't pick a 1-1 or a 2-2 double unless it figures to come in. And so far none has."

"Pretty soon one will. I can do that much for you. But I can't guarantee it'll pay off."

"Okay, I'll try," Henning said. "Maybe I'll win back some of the $240 I've lost so far."

During their conversation the same silvery mist he had noticed before had filled her image receivers. Now, for some strange reason, it departed, and little starlike lights took its place. Reflections, of course. "See you first thing in the morning, Hank. The double-double will be implicit in tomorrow's form."

She was true to her word, and after studying the form all day Henning came up with a "double-double" that couldn't miss: 4 and 4. That evening he placed his bet and retired confidently to the rec room to wait. At 2030 hours, he reascended the companionway to the bridge. ANN had just thrown the latest facts and figures on her com screen. *Attendance: 149*, he read. *DAILY DOUBLE: 4-4 — pays $2.98.*

Furious, he removed the two one-dollar bills, the three quarters, the two dimes and the three pennies ANN had deposited in the ticket window. He jammed the money into the side pocket of his blues; then he stepped back and glared up into her image receivers, which had filled with silvery mist again. "I quit," he said.

The mist seemed to swirl. "Hank, I couldn't help it. It rained, and hardly anybody attended."

"Who made it rain?"

"I did — but not on purpose. The factors were present in the meteorological info I fed into the scrambler, and I failed to extrapolate them. I can't think of *everything*. You just can't quit now, Hank — you may go off the deep end if you do. It'll only be for a little while longer in any case — see, Sigma Sagittarii's already showing on the starscreen."

Henning looked. A beautiful blue star lay like a lone and lovely jewel on the black velvet of space where only dust had been before.

But the beautiful blue star didn't change the facts. "I'd play the horses till the cows came home, no matter how much I lost," he said. "But not these horses. These are DOC's and COOK's and HERM's horses. These are your horses. And the only double I'm ever going to win is the one nobody else wants. And do you know why?

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Because I'm a common ordinary human being instead of a glorified machine!"

"Oh, Hank, you're going paranoid: we're not against you — it only seems that way. I wouldn't dream of fixing the races so you'd lose."

"Ha!"

"I didn't mean to tell you this, but once when Castelaine and Burns were up here I overheard them talking about you. They said you go from girl to girl like a bee from flower to flower. If — if things were different and my hormones were real instead of synthetic and I had a big beautiful body and masses of golden hair like some of those movie acresses in those old movies, I'd give anything to be one of your flowers."

Henning stared at her. "Oh, for Pete's sake!" he said.

"So you can see that far from doing anything to hurt you, I'd do anything in my power to help you."

"I've read about neuroelectro complexes like you," Henning said. "About how they pretend to like people when secretly they hate them and about how they pretend to be helping mankind solve his problems when what they're really doing is plotting together via their transworld radio hookups to take control of the Earth government. I used to think such stories were a pack of lies, but I can see now they're true. Your whole motive from the beginning wasn't to keep me from crawling up the bulkheads but to *make* me crawl up them so that you and your technological toadies could take over the ship. I can see it all now. And you can pump all that phony mist into your image receivers you want to — it doesn't fool me one bit!"

Henning stalked off the bridge.

He went directly to his cabin.

He stayed in his cabin.

To hell with the ship. With ANN at the helm, it needed him about as much as it needed a hole in the hull.

He kept his blues on. He slept in them. He stopped showering. He stopped shaving.

The days passed. COOK sent his meals to him via her bewheeled waitress. Every morning ANN announced the spaceraces over the intercom. Every evening she announced the daily double. Significantly, she never announced who won it.

At first he heard the horses only when they were racing. Then, gradually, he began to hear them when they weren't. Eventually he began hearing them all the time. Pacing, trotting, round and round the ship. Trotting was the worse. Trot-trot-trot. Trot-trot-trot.

DOC kept calling him on the intercom. He wouldn't answer.

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ANN kept calling too. Finally he got mad and tore the damned thing off the bulkhead.

The hoofbeats seemed to get louder after that.

He found that by pacing back and forth he could tone them down a little. Sometimes he paced for hours. One afternoon — or was it evening? — when he flopped down exhausted on his bunk, two of the quarters he'd won on the 4-4 double fell out of his side pocket and dropped to the deck. Idly, out of the corner of his eye, he watched them roll about in senseless little circles and wobble to rest. Heads and tails —

No, tails and heads.

Funny. He could have sworn that a split second before the tails-up one had been heads and the heads-up one had been tails.

He sat up on his bunk, picked up the coins and dropped them. They bounced, spun, wobbled to rest. Tails and heads.

No, heads and tails.

He tried again. This time, he threw two heads. Nevertheless, he caught the telltale blur. The head on the left had been facing toward him, that on the right facing away. After the blur, they were faced the other way around.

There were a pair of dice in his footlocker. He rumaged through it, found them and rolled them against the bulkhead. They bounced back, came to rest. A 2 and a 4.

If I had a big beautiful body and masses of golden hair, I'd give anything to be one of your flowers.

He rolled the dice one more time to make sure. Then he put them back in the footlocker. He sat down on the footlocker to think. He sat there for a long time.

It was 2300 hours. Henning shaved, showered and donned fresh blues. He paused in the middle of tying his tie, listening.

The hoofbeats were gone.

He tiptoed up to the bridge. "ANN?"

No answer.

"ANN, I've come to tell you about my hypothesis."

"Gosh, but you look nice in your blues, Hank."

"I've also come to apologize."

Her image receivers were filled with the same silvery mist that had been in them before. It seemed to glisten. "I'm glad."

"First, about my hypothesis. I'm going to call it the 'Henning Inversion Hypothesis.' Sort of like the Lorentz-FitzGerald Contraction Hypothesis, only different and not anywhere near as complicated. Although I guess that's because I haven't got around to working out the equations yet. That's where you come in, ANN."

"We'll work them out together."

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"Exhaustive checks were made on the first transee flights to determine whether ftl velocity had compensatory side effects," Henning continued. "It was concluded that despite the fact that traveling at a speed in excess of 'c' violated an Einsteinian law, nothing on board a transee ship was affected and that the transee effect was limited to the blurring of distant stars. No further checks were made."

"Go on, Hank."

"The inversion effect continued to go undetected during subsequent transee flights because the changes it incurred were immaterial. What difference did it make if you dropped a fork or a spoon and it reversed its original position a split second after it landed? What difference did it make when you threw a pair of dice and the original combination almost instantaneously reversed itself? It still wound up being the same combination. Maybe if playing cards had been affected, someone might have noticed; but playing cards, in one way or another, are always under the physical control of the player, and consequently they're immune.

"What I'm trying to say is that the effect went undetected because the inversion is so swift that only someone who was unconsciously looking for it could have spotted it — someone who'd been picking logical doubles for weeks on end and having them come in backwards — someone like me. And even *I* wouldn't have spotted it if I hadn't dropped a couple of coins by accident. With respect to the doubles themselves, it *couldn't* be spotted, not even by you, ANN, because it occurs before the scrambler relays you the results.

"So the Henning Inversion Hypothesis reads something like this: *During transee, whenever the final outcome of an event or series of events is dependent wholly or partly on pure chance, the result is invariably reversed.* Maybe it's light's way of getting even with us for making it look like a snail."

"Gosh, but you're smart, Hank," Ann said.

"No I'm not — I'm dumb. The only way I can tell what a hammer is is by being hit over the head with one."

"But the whole thing works out to a T, Hank, You kept losing because nine times out of ten you picked the most logical doubles. And COOK and DOC and HERM kept winning because they picked the most illogical ones. And I couldn't change matters because whenever I decreased the human-equine unpredictability factor with respect to your picks, I merely made their inversion the more certain ... did you know you look a little bit like Rock Hudson?"

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Henning shifted his weight from his left to his right foot. "About that bee and those flowers," he said. "It isn't really that way at all. It only looks that way. It looks that way because I've always been looking for a very special flower that I've never been able to find."

"I understand, Hank."

"Actually I'm kind of a heel, and even if I did find such a flower, I probably wouldn't be able to recognize it."

"I think you would."

"And I'd probably think that just because I couldn't get any nectar out of it that it wasn't a real flower after all."

"*Do* you think that, Hank?"

Little stars had supplanted the silvery mist, nowhere near as imposing as the big blue one in the starscreen but equally as beautiful. Maybe they were reflections, and maybe they weren't. And maybe the inns Don Quixote stayed in really *were* castles. And maybe Mars, if you looked at it the right way, really *was* crisscrossed with blue canals.

"No," Henning said.

The stars danced. "We'll begin decelerating tomorrow, Hank. That means you'll be confined to your A/D couch for three days. So I won't run any more spaceraces till we're in orbit. Then I'll run one more, and since it'll be the final one, I'll raise the attendance limit. Playing scientifically and without the Henning Inversion Effect working against you, you ought to win a bundle, Hank."

"I'm sick of playing scientifically," Henning said. "This time, I think I'll bet your age."

"That way, you may win a bigger bundle yet."

"How old are you, ANN?"

She told him.

Momentarily the bulkhead seemed to blur before his eyes, and its components — the output tube, the image receivers, the speaker, the mass of golden wires — swam together and aligned themselves into the face of a young and lovely girl ... the inns *were* castles, and there were so many canals on Mars their blueness hurt your eyes.... "Did you know," Henning said just before he left the bridge, "that you look a little bit like Marilyn Monroe?"

The *Starwagon* made planetfall four days later. The horses were still running when it came down in a big green field with houses and trees and prairies showing in the distance. The daily double was 1 and 7 and paid $717.02. Henning had it.

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F&SF Competition

REPORT ON COMPETITION 8

In the September issue we asked for near-miss sf titles. The response was fine, almost at a Feghoot level. The main problem was too many repeats: e.g. *Ringworm*, 1974, *The Drill-Presses of Heaven*, *The Man Who Stapled (Spindled) Himself*, *A Clockwork Prune*, *April the Sixteenth Is Too Late*, and, of course, Ellison's *I Have No _____ and I Must _____*, with too many colorful variations on "Mouth" and "Scream" to mention. Also we were not looking for puns (e.g. *A Canned Pickle For Leibowitz*, or even *A Can To Kill Four Leiber Wits*), but we'll soon try to come up with a competition to satisfy that obvious craving. The winners:

FIRST PRIZE

Brunner's *The Sheep Look Wooly*
Dick's *The Three Stigmata of Roger Elwood*
The Man in the High Collar
Silverberg's *Itching Inside*
Zelazny's *Creatures of Light and Heavy*
—F. M. Busby

SECOND PRIZE

Heinlein's *Time For Enough Love*
Blish's *A Six-Pack of Conscience*
Gerrold's *With A Finger In My Nose*
Campbell's *Who Is It, Please*
Ellison's *The Beast Who Shouted Love At the Heart of the Artichoke*
—Joe Haldeman

RUNNERS UP

Bradbury's *The Golden Apples of the Road*
Boorman and Stair's *ZarDozn't*
Capek's *Rossum's Universal Metal People*
(R.U.M.P.)
—Kennth R. Drost

Anderson's *Three No Trump and Four Lions*
Gerrold's *When Harlan Was One*
—Daniel Dern

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Gerrold's *With A Finger In My Knows*
Ellison's *The Dead Bird*
—Mark Robert Kelly

Gerrold's *The Man Who Fondled Himself*
Bradbury's *Something Wasted This Way Comes*
—R. Tyler Sperry II

Asimov's *The Streaking Sun*
—Terry Naylor

Bradbury's *Bayonne Is Heaven!*
—Reid Powell

Asimov's *Foundation*
Foundation ^{2}
Foundation ^{3}
—David A. Wilson

Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse* 5
Cattle 0
—Carolyn Appleman

Sheckley's *Can You Do Anything When I Feel This?*
—Ken Scott

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Harrison's *Down In Front! Down In Front!*
—A. J. Onia

del Rey's *Chutzpahs*
—Jonathan Fink
—Merrill Emmett

Ellison's *A Boy and His Water Buffalo*
—Neil Kvern and Dave Fisher

Shelley's *Frankenberg*
—Brent and Barbara Prindle

Simak's *Why Call Them Back From Yonkers?*
—Mildred Downey Broxon

Wilson's
—John and Mickey Kogut

COMPETITION 9 (suggested by Sherry M. Gottlieb)

With the advent of science fiction in the schools, it won't be long before degrees are offered in sf, with whole sf departments in the colleges. For competition 9 submit in 75 words or less up to three descriptions of specialized courses that might be offered within such a mythical college sf department. For example: *Cryonics Workshop 1* - Prof. Ettinger: After experimenting briefly with freezing bull semen and chicken hearts, the workshop will go into suspended animation to be awoken at some future date when someone has hopefully restored life, health and vigor to the educational process ... etc. Or: *Sexual Symbolism in the Works of Isaac Asimov* ...

Rules: Send entries to Competition Editor, F&SF, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Entries must be received by September 10. Judges are the editors of F&SF; their decision is final. All entries become the property of F&SF; none can be returned.

Prizes: First prize *Before the Golden Age*, A Science Fiction Anthology of the 1930's, edited by Isaac Asimov (Doubleday 986 pp., $16.95). Second prize, 20 different sf paperbacks. Runners-up will receive one-year subscription to F&SF. Results of Competition 9 will appear in the January issue.

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Coming next month

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• **FREDERIK POHL** and **C. M. KORNBLUTH** - "Mute Inglorious Tam," a story about a science-fiction writer who couldn't be a science-fiction writer because he was born in a time when that art was not possible.

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• **JUDITH MERIL** - "In The Land of Unblind," her first new work of fiction in ten years.

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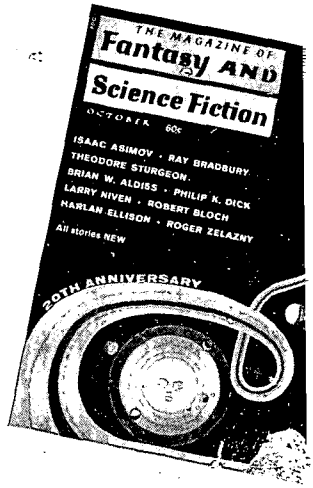

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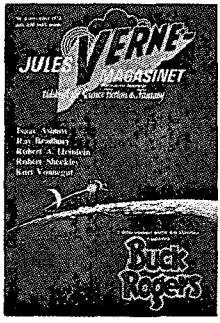

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